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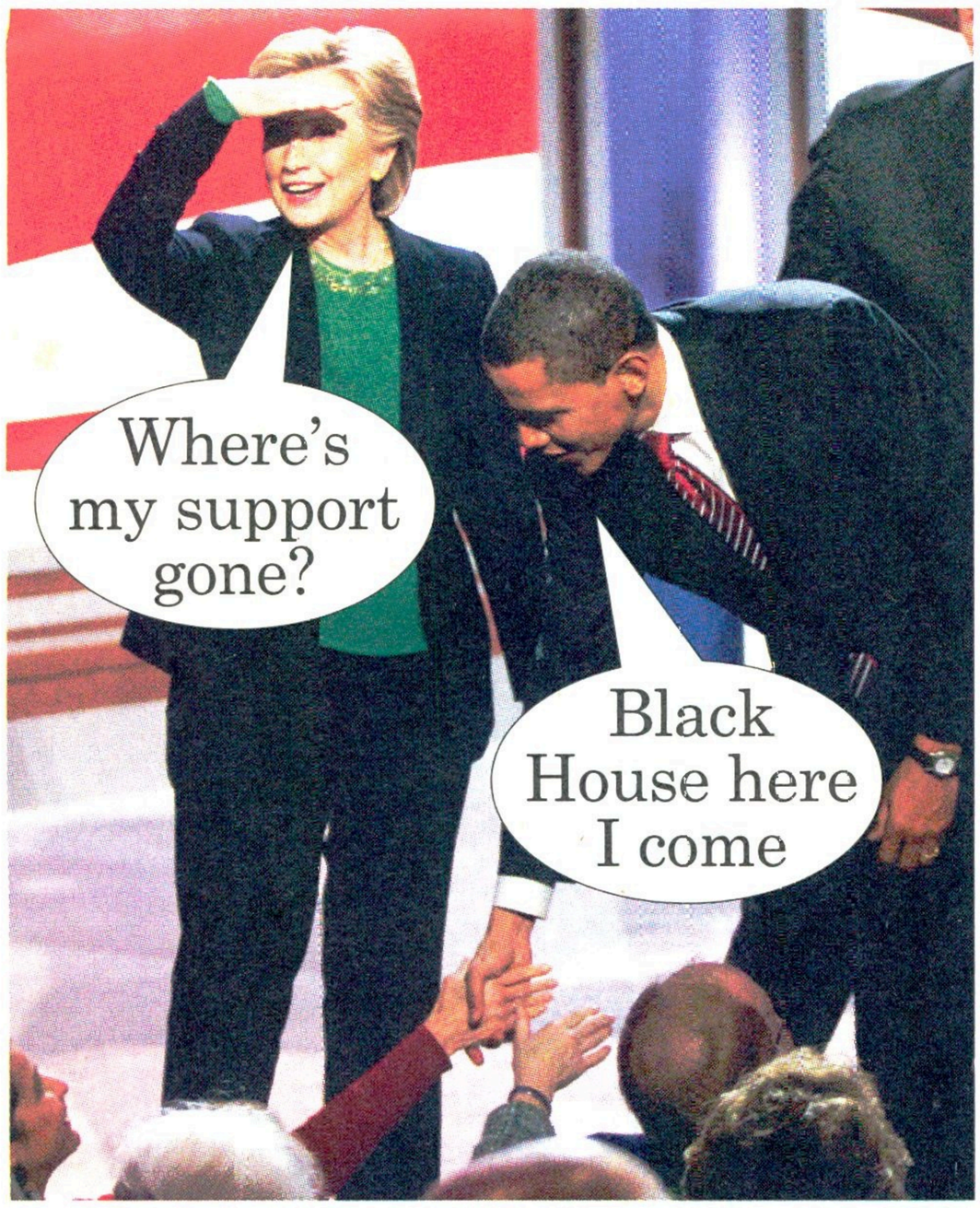

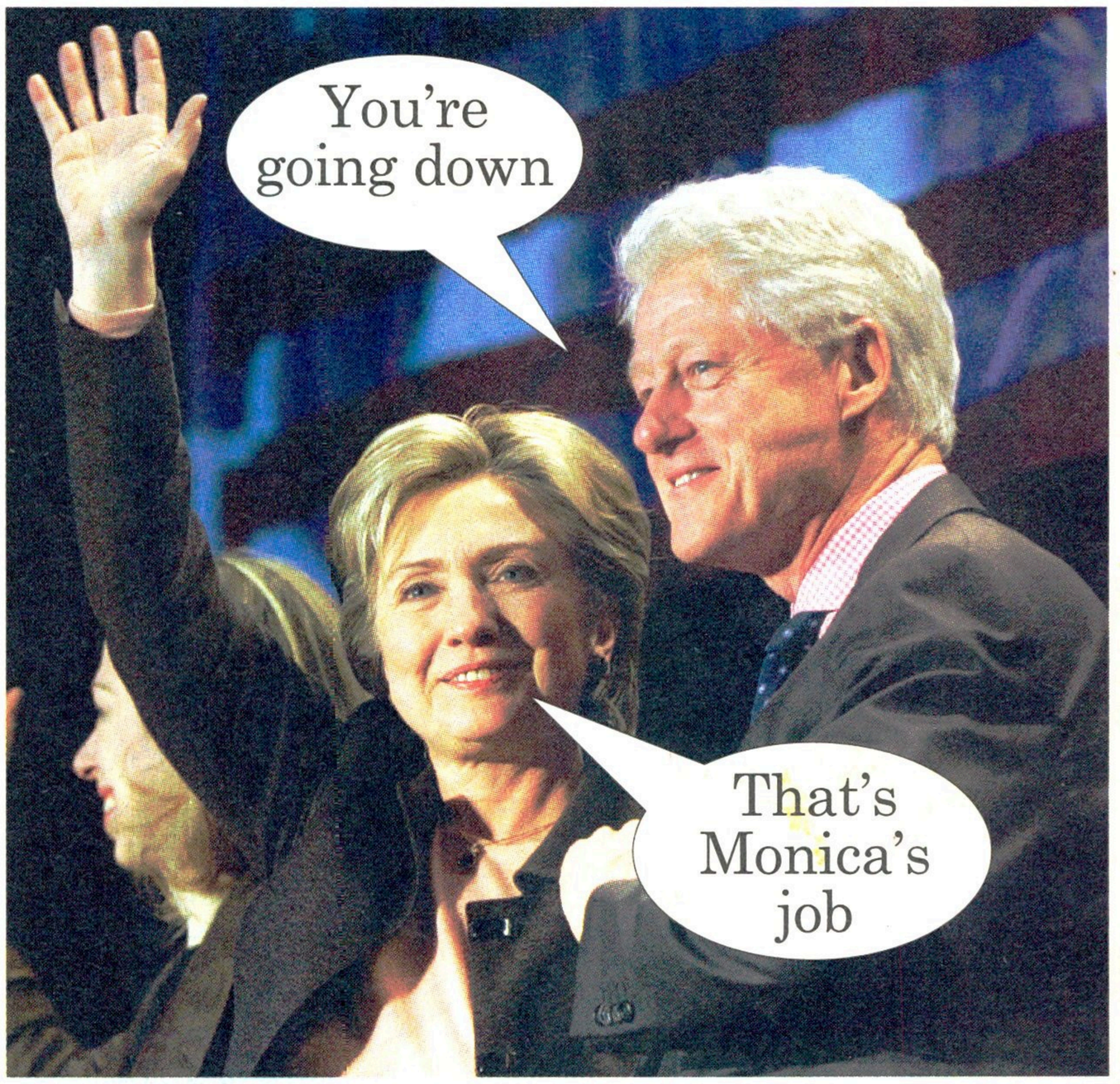

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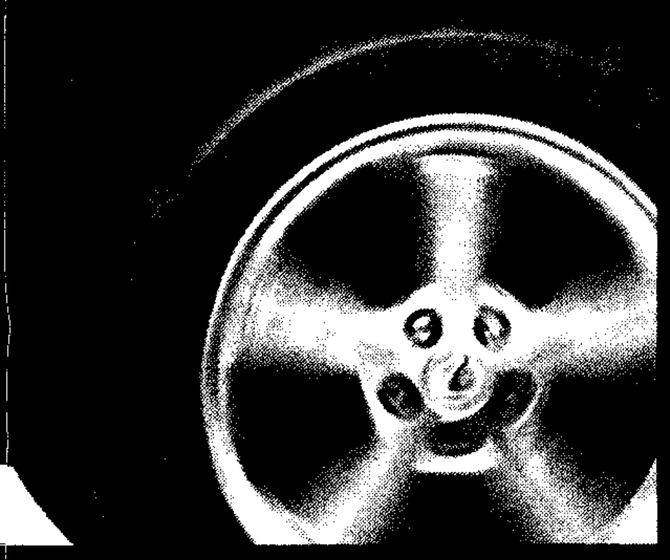

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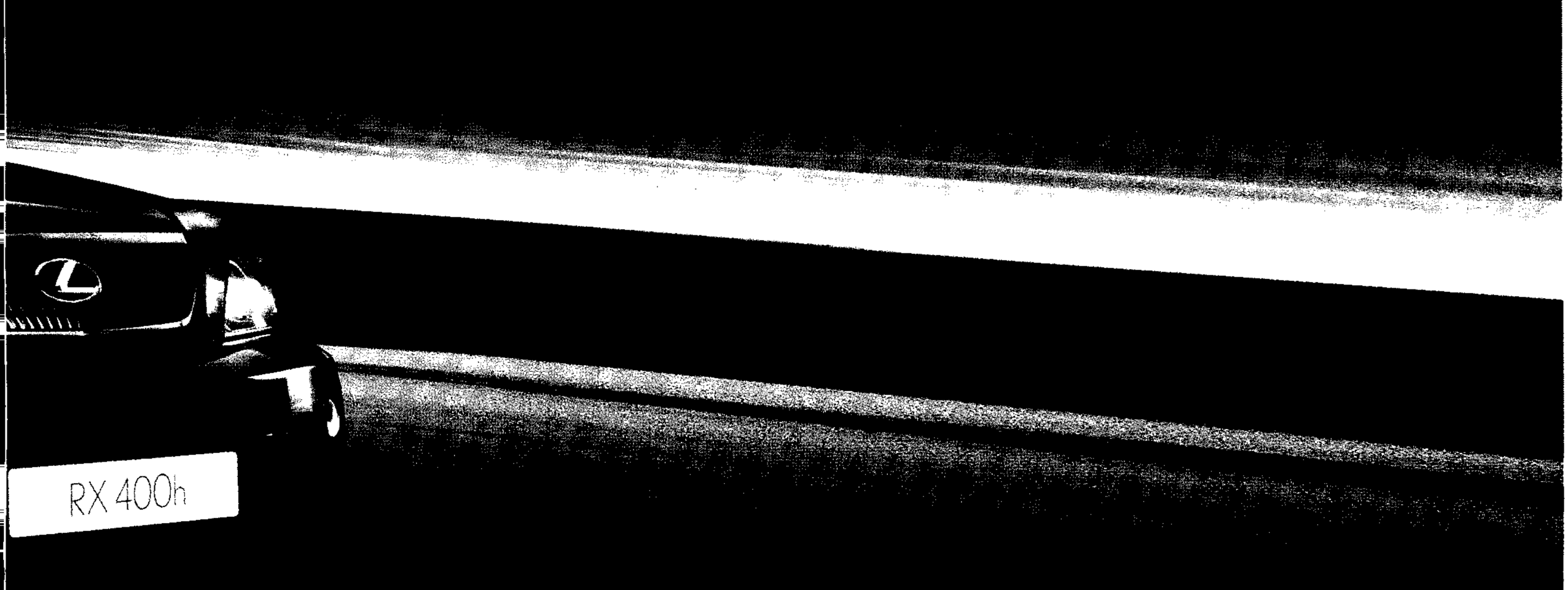

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Urgent Appeal to provide medical supplies for the people of Gaza

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The effects of nearly two years of sanctions, the cutting-off of fuel supplies, repeated military incursions and the closure of its borders have left Gaza's beleaguered health care system on the verge of collapse.

The siege has left three out of four people reliant on food aid to survive and chronic malnutrition is becoming commonplace. Infant mortality rates are soaring. People are becoming sicker – and there is a desperate shortage of drugs and medical supplies with which to treat them.

Reserves of fuel to run hospital generators are all but exhausted and while the health system crumbles, patients desperately seeking medical care outside of Gaza are frequently denied permission to leave.

MAP will remain in Gaza and continue to provide longer-term medical support to the Palestinian people – through providing access to water, supporting children traumatised by conflict and caring for people with disabilities. But today we need your help so that patients like nine-year-old Maram can receive urgent medical attention.

Maram suffers from *idiopathic thrombocytopenia* which means her body does not produce enough of the blood platelets which help to seal minor cuts and form blood clots. She was unable to leave her hospital bed in Gaza City because with even a tiny cut she could have bled to death. The drug used to treat her condition – intravenous immunoglobin (IVIG) – was not available in Gaza. But thankfully MAP was able to supply her doctors with IVIG and Maram has recently left hospital. **A gift from you of £45 today could help provide another child like Maram with a course of potentially life-saving IVIG.**

© Image supplied by Ma'an Images/Wissam Nassar

A Palestinian girl receiving medical treatment after being wounded in an Israeli raid in Jabalia refugee camp, northern Gaza, October 30, 2007.

Donate now: call 0207 226 7691 or visit www.map-uk.org

Unless doctors and hospitals in Gaza are urgently provided with medical supplies, medicines and equipment, it is inevitable that vulnerable, wounded and sick patients will die unnecessarily.

MAP is one of the few humanitarian aid agencies that retains a permanent presence in Gaza. **We urgently need your support to purchase and deliver life-saving drugs and medical supplies to help doctors and nurses in Gaza to save lives.**

Hundreds of children and thousands of people in Gaza are today in situations similar to Maram's. In October, since which the situation has deteriorated considerably, the UN reported that 20% of essential drugs and 31% of medical supplies were at zero availability.

Stocks of medications, antibiotics, syringes, intravenous solutions, surgical gloves, suture sets and blood-testing needles are perilously low. Dialysis machines need repair and spare parts.

With your support MAP's experienced team in Gaza can supply hospitals with medical supplies and equipment which will, without doubt, help to save people's lives.

£45 could help provide a course of IVIG drugs to another child like Maram.

£80 could provide Haemiodialysis Powder for sixteen renal patients to receive an essential course of dialysis.

£200 could provide anaesthetics and equipment such as scalpels, swabs, sutures and drips that will enable doctors to perform life-saving operations.

Over the coming weeks MAP will continue to do all we can to help meet the urgent medical needs of Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza.

Thank you for anything you are able to give to help.

I will help MAP to provide life-saving medical supplies to Gaza

Please fill in this form, place in an envelope and return your completed form postage free to: Medical Aid for Palestinians, 33a Islington Park Street, FREEPOST ND6445, London N1 1BR. Thank you.

I would like to make a donation today of ☐ **£45** ☐ **£80** ☐ **£200** ☐ **My own choice of amount is** £ ____

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We would like to keep in touch with you to give you information about our work and how you can help. If you don't want to receive this please tick this box. ☐
Medical Aid for Palestinians will not forward your details to any third parties. Registered Charity no. 1045315 **PI0108**

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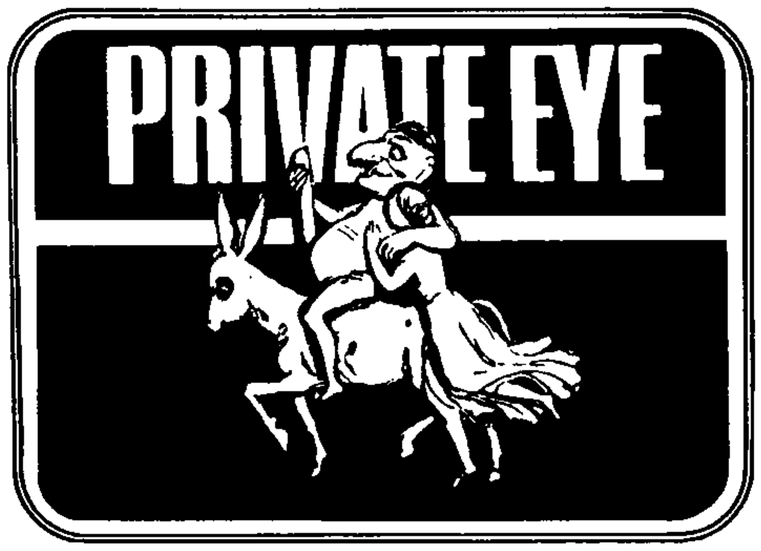
☐ I am a UK taxpayer and would like Medical Aid for Palestinians to treat all my donations from 6th April 2001 as Gift Aid donations until further notice.

N.B. You must pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that Medical Aid for Palestinians reclaims on your donations in the current tax year (currently 28p for every £1 you give). giftaid it



QUESTIONS are being asked about the hundreds of millions draining from health budgets into management consultants' pockets through the NHS's National Programme for IT, after *Eye* 1198 disclosed the extent of the splurge.

One beneficiary has been ASE Consulting, paid £16.4m in 2006/07 and a total of £46m since 2003. ASE was in on the programme from the start, setting up the "design authority", and has won a series of contracts since.

Now IT health website *E-Health Insider* has discovered that ASE's boss and main shareholder, Alan McNeil, was chief technology officer for the programme from December 2002 to August 2005, when ASE was awarded most of its work, and remains an adviser. Yet even though he was in charge of the area from which ASE has earned around £50m so far, the company insists he was not involved in awarding himself work.

After whitewashing the national programme last year, the national audit office (NAO) is currently having another look. It might like to add the arrangements for dishing out consultancy contracts, including a juicy one to boss Richard Granger's old firm Deloitte, to what should be an extensive checklist

● *More Medicine Balls, page 12*

"Hello, I think I can smell profiteering"

EDITORIAL
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ABC

"He hasn't caught the vomiting bug, he just broke an energy-efficient light bulb"

TREBLES all round at EDF Energy this week, as Gordon Brown gave his blessing to a new generation of nuclear power stations. The French state-controlled company is hot favourite to win the contracts to build these new plants.

Barely a decade after moving into the British market, EDF is already the largest electricity supplier in London, the south-east and the south-west. With this week's nuclear decision, its quest for national dominance in the UK seems unstoppable.

Congratulations are due to EDF's chief executive Vincent de Rivaz – and of course to EDF's head of media relations Andrew Brown – or, as the prime minister calls him, Bruv!

● *Gordon's Gongs, page 8*

WHEN Kieron Poynter, chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers, started to investigate how the combined Inland Revenue and Customs giant (HMRC) managed to lose so much personal data, he was flummoxed.

"On starting this review," he declared, "my immediate impression of HMRC was one of complexity… in particular I found it difficult to relate roles and responsibilities amongst senior management to accountability."

And who can blame him? The dog's dinner that was created when Revenue and Customs were amalgamated was the work of McKinsey, the management consultant at the heart of so many public service fiascos in recent decades.

For £5.3m McKinsey instituted a system of "customer units", "operations", "products/processes groups" and "corporate functions" which, as the *Eye* pointed out two years ago (1152), meant no one had a clue who was supposed to be doing what.

HMRC has now agreed to rip it all up and start again. But having fallen for one consultancy firm's bullshit and paid the price, HMRC has now turned to another for salvation. Responding to a Cabinet Office "capability review" that highlighted the same failings as Poynter, HMRC's acting chairman Dave Hartnett promised to "accelerate the pace of change using PaceSetter as the way we do change across the department".

"PaceSetter" involves "lean" processing techniques, dreamt up by consultants and promoted at HMRC by PA Consulting. In practice junior jobs have been rendered menial to the point of mindlessness and morale has plummeted so that nobody bothers to ask how 25m people's personal details should be handled. Just the way to restore order to the tax and benefits system.

● *The tax dodger's friend? Page 29*

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"By holding regular conference calls with contractors and line controllers, engineers are able to pinpoint potential delays and take action before it's too late. Buffers have been put in place to avoid slipping into commute times; work is scheduled for completion at least three hours before track operations commence." – *Feature on west-coast rail upgrade in Bechtel magazine, January 2007*

● *Rugby Balls – Signal Failures, page 12*

AFTER Benazir Bhutto's assassination, the UK Foreign Office published a self-congratulatory interview with David Miliband in which the foreign secretary claimed: "We've always been clear that we support the development of strong systems in Pakistan."

Really? In August last year Gordon Brown applauded the "flourishing, modern relationship" between Britain and Pakistan, but made no mention of General Pervez Musharraf's flourishing modern dictatorship. The previous month, Miliband had emphasised Musharraf's role in "countering terrorism and ensuring security for the region" in "a partnership that benefits both our countries". Again, no mention of democracy there.

It was only when the general started to lose his grip, locking up judges and lawyers, that Milibad mentioned the dirty word "elections", backing US plans for Bhutto to campaign as a partner for Musharraf in the lower house.

Notwithstanding all this guff, the regional strongman's security services proved unable – or unwilling – to protect Bhutto, killed in the second attempt on her life in two months.

● *Dynasty lives! Letter from Delhi, page 17*

AMID repeated promises to purge the beautiful game, not least of bungs channelled through secret offshore companies, who has the Football Association picked to fulfil Gordon Brown's dream and bring the World Cup to England in 2018?

Soho Square recently announced the appointment of Peter Hargitay as its bid consultant, a Swiss PR agent-turned-special adviser to FIFA chairman Sepp Blatter. The deal is with an outfit called European Consultancy Network Ltd, which will provide the services of Hargitay and another FIFA man, Mark Siegler, who quits as Blatter's communications director.

But mystery surrounds Hargitay and Siegler's firm. Companies House records show that a company with its name was dissolved in March 2007, having last traded in 2004. In which case, how could the FA have appointed it? An FA spokesman admitted the new European Consultancy Network Ltd wasn't a British company but refused to say where it was registered.

Hargitay was equally coy. Surely the FA hasn't signed a deal with a company registered in one of those secret offshore tax havens favoured by the game's spivs and bung-takers?

HOT on the heels of ITV linking up with the £50m "People's Lottery Giveaway" (*Eye* 1197) comes another hare-brained government scheme inspired by trash TV.

"Spark" will give homelessness charities the chance for a share of a £1.5m pot – provided they compete against other charities in a battle of "bright ideas".

Announcing the scheme last month, junior housing minister Iain Wright described it as a "Dragons' Den"-style competition in which homelessness charities and hostels will pitch for funding, "mentoring" and a one-day "enterprise make-over". Wright hailed it as a "fantastic example of government working in partnership with the voluntary and private sector".

Proving that homelessness can be fun, a shortlist of 15 organisations will be announced next month. Each will receive coaching in readiness for a "Dragons' Den-style pitch event" which will whittle the shortlist down to five winners.

The "dragons" will consist of a panel of "social entrepreneurs" including *Big Issue* founder John Bird and those well-known Good Samaritans, er, PricewaterhouseCoopers.

● *More Media News, page 10*

Plus...

■ **HP Sauce: The battle for Two Jags' seat** 8
■ **Frozen pensioners, roasted fat cats; Lockerbie, QinetiQ and more** 27-29

Street Of Shame

EVEN after the Fortier affair former Home Secretary David Blunkett remains incorrigible in the presence of a pretty woman.

In front of some 500 of Fleet Street's finest, Beardie gave out the *What The Papers Say* awards at the Cafe Royal on the last Friday before Christmas. One of those to win an award was the youthful Eva Simpson, one of the *Mirror*'s 3am Girls (and just off to join the Digger's pisspoor *thelondonpaper*).

As Simpson walked up to the stage to accept her prize, there was a certain amount of jostling when Blunkett, accompanied by his guide dog Sadie, did not know which side to stand. He handled the moment with aplomb, telling the glamorously attired Simpson: "If yer feel a wet nose under your skirt it's the dog's."

WITH Pakistan in the headlines, how fortunate for the *Daily Telegraph* to have a specialist hack on the case. Day after day its coverage is bylined "by Isambard Wilkinson, Pakistan correspondent".

Alert readers may wonder, however, why it doesn't say "from Isambard Wilkinson in Islamabad". The answer is that he has been stuck in London for the last six weeks, after he and two *Telegraph* colleagues, Colin Freeman and Damien McElroy, were expelled from Pakistan.

A tribute to their fearless reporting? Alas not. The cause of the trouble was a phrase carelessly included in an editorial about President Musharraf last November by leader-writer Simon Scott-Plummer, who recalled the old formulation often used by US politicians of foreign dictators – that he "may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch". When Musharraf read it he declared that it was a mortal insult to the entire Pakistani nation, and *Telegraph* hacks have been banned ever since.

WATCH out for a new year campaign from the *Express* north of the border demanding independence for Scotland.

Proprietor Richard "Dirty" Desmond met the Scottish National Party leadership just before Christmas to ingratiate himself and is now loyally ensuring his paper parrots its party line of separation from the Union.

Although Dirty Des's initiative has more to do with a desire to eat into Scottish sales of his hated rival, the *Mail*, than any genuine political belief, his Scottish hacks almost sound as if they believe in it. "Scottish *Daily Express* readers have spoken: they want our country to become independent," gushed Kerry Gill on 18 December, as she hailed "a staggering 59 percent" who had phoned in to support the proposal.

As the *Express* well knows, reader telephone polls ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. Only last January, under the headline "You tell us Union must stay", it acclaimed another reader poll: "A resounding 77.5 percent voted 'Yes' to our question: 'Do we want to maintain the Union?'"

RICHARD "Dirty" Desmond's newspapers are throbbing with excitement at the latest twist in the Britney Spears saga.

"Britney has to be tied down after holding her baby sons hostage," the *Express* raved. Meanwhile according to the *Star*, "there were suggestions she had been hiding a mental breakdown for weeks".

Of course Britney's fragile mental state can't have been helped by the recent announcement that her younger sister Jamie Lee Spears, only 16, is pregnant. That news was given maximum publicity because Jamie Lee and their mother Lynne were paid $1m by an American magazine to reveal the pregnancy exclusively in its pages.

Indeed one reader on the *Daily Express* website felt moved to write: "Her mother has a lot to answer for." And which mag happily shelled out for Jamie Lee's story? The US edition of *OK!* – owned and run by Dirty Des.

"SLAVE LABOUR THAT SHAMES AMERICA" shrieked the front page of the *Independent* on 19 December, over a "special investigation" into the plight of migrant workers in the US who, in the paper's words, "work a great deal to end up earning hardly anything".

This is, of course, nothing like the newsdesk at the *Independent*, which at any time is staffed by between three and six graduates on work experience out of a full complement of around a dozen hacks.

"It includes doing all the work that a fully trained journalist should be doing, and getting shouted at by other members of the newsdesk, without getting so much as travel expenses in return," reports one bitter recent workie.

"When I was there, there was one work experience guy who had been there for nine months without getting paid."

"MY DESPAIR for Overcrowded England," wailed the headline on the *Daily Mail*'s leader-page on 2 January. "Fed up with being preached to about the unalloyed benefits of immigration, Leo McKinstry has bought a house in France."

Cue a 1,200-word piece from McKinstry about how he and his wife "bought a small property abroad recently – in our case, in southern France. And what a relief it is to go there…"

A classic why-oh-why piece – classic in every sense, since McKinstry has owned (and written about) his house in France for years. But the wily hack sometimes seems curiously uncertain about when he bought it.

In October 2006 he wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that "three years ago, after almost a decade of blissful holidays in southern France, my wife and I decided to buy a house in a market town near Avignon". Yet almost a year earlier, in November 2005, he had told *Telegraph* readers that "we bought a home in the town of Carpentras about 10 miles east of Avignon three years ago…" And more than three years before *that*, in August 2002, the *Daily Mail* ran another of his tributes to the French (who "glory in their past, venerate the family, love hunting and hate the euro"), in which McKinstry revealed that "my wife and I recently bought a house in the heart of Provence".

How much longer can he claim to have bought it "recently"? At least another year or two, surely.

THE ZZZ-LIST

Utterly pathetic non-stories about celebrities from the national press. Readers' contributions welcomed...

"It is not exactly *Casino Royale* – but James Bond star Daniel Craig found the homely charm of the Blue Lion at Leyburn in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales very much to his liking yesterday. There wasn't a dry martini in sight as Craig and his girlfriend Satsuki Mitchell sipped Bloody Marys."

– *Richard Kay,* Daily Mail, *1 January*

ON 22 December the *Daily Mail* devoted a double-page spread to detailing what it called "the squalid truth about Our Man and the belly dancer".

It was a "sordid episode" which led to the former ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, leaving his wife for the "rather amoral" Nadira Alieva, with whom he has been living for the past three years. "Last weekend, a Sunday newspaper told a somewhat sanitised version of her story," the paper sniffed disapprovingly.

And which was the downmarket rag that paid for Alieva's exclusive 3,000-word account of her affair with the "gentleman with a soft, kind heart"? The, er, *Mail on Sunday!*

THE plethora of househunting websites "have a new rival", reported the *Sunday Times* in a 4,000-word plug, sorry, feature, testing new property search engine Globrix against other offerings.

The article made no bones about Globrix's part-ownership by News International (the company made a multi-million pound investment last October), but failed to mention that supposed rival Propertyfinder, which also got "the thumbs up" from one tester, is also 50-percent owned by News International.

Meanwhile other property websites that use the same "Google-style" searches as Globrix (such as Zoomf and Dothomes) get nary a mention.

WILL 2008 bring any respite for long-suffering readers of *Times* guru Anatole Kaletsky? As we noted in our recent Hackwatch (*Eye* 1194), in 2007 he revealed a talent for dud predictions that made his colleague Mystic Mogg seem positively oracular.

But *Times* readers aren't the only victims. Spare a thought for the poor mugs who subscribe to his financial advice service, GaveKal. Kaletsky and his colleagues at GaveKal have had to eat their hats repeatedly over recent months after getting it totally wrong on several of the big themes – insisting there's nothing wrong with the US housing market, that the US dollar would rise against the euro (it then tanked) and that European stocks can never outperform their rivals (they did, by quite a lot).

The year ended on a familiar note as GaveKal dispatched this Christmas *mea culpa*: "In late November, we published a piece called A Year-End Rally, in which we argued that the stage was set for a strong recovery on shares. As it turned out this was not our best call… Indeed, month-to-date, the World MSCI has dropped – 3.6%, on track for the second worst December performance in at least 25 years."

As Kaletsky and his colleagues repeatedly point out: "It has never been so expensive to be rich." With advice like theirs, it's no surprise.

MUCH glee in Fleet Street over a production cock-up at the *Spectator* whereby a full-page article by Clemency Burton-Hill on page 14 also appears in its entirety on page 16.

But no one pointed to the cause: Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill, chief boxwallah, and his proprietors, the Barclays. Until recently the *Speccie* had two revise-subs, old hands from Fleet Street, whose job it was to check every article and page. They were fired as Brillo pursued his vision of downgrading the magazine into a vehicle for glossy lifestyle adverts while pumping resources into its blogtastic website.

The same policy applies at the *Telegraph*: cut costs and maximise profits by ditching experienced hacks and hyping up online gimmickry. Alas, *Speccie* readers must brace themselves for many more moments of *déjà lu*.

WHEN new *Observer* editor John Mulholland took over last week, he was quick to reassure staff that he would uphold the paper's traditions.

No doubt he was referring to the glorious tradition of enmity between *Observer* hacks and *Guardian* hacks. But he may struggle to match the standards set in 2007.

Even the dowager Polly Toynbee plunged into the melee, berating the *Observer* for running a "bizarre" editorial on inheritance tax. Last month she devoted a column to the "paranoia" and "decadence" of *Observer* pundit Henry Porter – whereupon outgoing *Observer* editor Roger Alton informed readers that being attacked by "dotty" Polly was like being savaged by a dead sheep. At Alton's various leaving parties just before Christmas almost the sole topic of conversation was the "fucking wankers at the *Guardian*" who had forced him out.

Can Mulholland keep the flames of ill-will blazing brightly? His colleagues certainly hope so.

"BEFORE holding forth on their favourite remedy, celebrities should get their facts straight, experts say," trumpeted the *Daily Mail* over a report by charity Sense about Science on 3 January.

"Gwyneth Paltrow has been singled out for her lack of knowledge of the genetics of cancer. The actress said recently: 'I am convinced that by eating biological foods it is possible to avoid tumours.' But Professor Tim Hunt, of charity Cancer Research UK, said: 'There is little evidence to implicate particular diets or particular foods with increased risk of cancer.'"

So which paper has, in the last year alone, run the following headlines: "Red meat 'can raise the risk of cancer by 25 percent'"; "Now cancer experts add bacon, ham and drink to danger list"; "66 % 'risk cancer by lack of fruit and veg'"; "Junk food heightens cancer risk for women"; "Watercress can cut risk of cancer"; and "Women who eat brown bread halve the risk of breast cancer"? Er, that would be the *Mail*.

WAR IS HELMAND

A REGULAR item of chit chat over the breakfast egg banjo in Helmand Province is the status of the eight Chinook helicopters promised by the Ministry of Defence "to boost operations in Afghanistan".

Eight new Chinooks is a big deal. These big, twin-rotor machines are used a lot in the high and dry desert air to shift troops, casualties and anything else that requires heavy lifting power. The army has been begging for more of them for some time.

Des Browne, the Defence Secretary, announced just before Christmas that he had signed "a £62m contract with Boeing to convert eight Chinook Mk3 helicopters to a support helicopter role" and they would be operational in 2009. 2009? What about 2008?

The truth is that these eight "Wokkas", as they're known, have been gathering hangar dust for six years. They were part of an order for 14 HC2 Chinooks costing £240m but were modified at the insistence of the MoD to become HC3s. Almost as soon as the modifications were completed, the MoD refused to grant the airworthiness certificates needed to get them off the ground.

At the time, the public accounts committee agreed that the MoD "might as well have bought eight turkeys". Now, finally, to that £240m can be added another £62m for the aircraft to be re-modified by the privatised defence contractor QinetiQ – who days before had been criticised by the National Audit Office for ripping off the taxpayers (see *Eyes passim*). Still, at least we'll eventually get our Wokkas.

'Square Basher'

HACKWATCH

Jonesly This Christmas

AS *Eye* readers may recall (see issue 1181), the failure of Nirpal Dhaliwal to spend more than £375 on his gift for wife Liz Jones last Christmas was a major contributing factor in their subsequent separation. So how did she spend her first Christmas on her own? Writing endless pieces for the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, whose staff appear to have taken several extra days off in the confidence that she alone would be able to fill their pages.

17 Dec: Jones offers her valete to those lost during 2007 with an admirable sense of proportion: "Of course, we will miss the legendary stylist Isabella Blow, who committed suicide in May at the age of 48. She was a breath of fresh air in an increasingly safe, corporate world. Less sorely mourned, though, will be the skinny jean. DVT, RIP. Long live opaque black tights!"

23 Dec: A comprehensive review of the state of culture in Britain. "The only thing I like about Tate Modern is the restaurant. And have you been to the Science Museum recently? None of the interactive stuff works; it is all, let's face it, expensive, subsidised drivel to give absentee fathers somewhere to take their estranged offspring on a Bank Holiday. The London Aquarium? It's rubbish."

24 Dec: Christmas Eve, and Jones considers what awaits her beneath the tree. "I always spend a lot of money on my boyfriend or husband, and they always love my presents because I have taste, imagination, patience, a selection of credit cards, tenacity and an eye for detail. Let me list here, in the manner of Bruce Forsyth, all the Christmas gifts I have bought the various men in my life." And, unbelievably, her editors let her do just that. For 1,030 words.

28 Dec: "I admit I have a bit of an anti-thing going on with American girls. Basically, I hate them," Jones informs *Daily Mail* readers in a 2,000-word essay. For why? "My former husband had a rather lengthy affair with one… She was incredibly self-obsessed, not funny at all, and obviously in possession of a very loose set of morals." Well, at least we know he has a type. Jones, meanwhile, has a new love interest: "I quite like him, mainly because, and I told him this, I didn't have to dumb myself down to be with him, something I often have to do with men because, the poor dears, they can't seem to cope with someone who is super bright."

30 Dec: Benazir Bhutto has been murdered in Pakistan. Jones offers *Mail on Sunday* readers some startling insights into "a country where, for those of us who live in the West, the idea of 'normal', particularly for women and children, is pretty much tantamount to Hell… When an earthquake struck northern Pakistan in 2005, I flew to Islamabad to report on the disaster… When I arrived, I was surprised by how manicured and modern the capital was. I was rather relieved to be able to check into a five-star hotel and order room service, and watch a heavily censored episode of Friends." The big event of the week, though, is saved for *three full pages* of the paper, beneath the headline: "Nobody was more achingly cool, trendy and urban than our columnist Liz Jones. So what on earth has made her move to 46 acres of wildest Exmoor with only a rescued racehorse and disabled pony for company?" Readers neither know or care, but wonder if there might be any chance of persuading her to go even further away.

31 Dec: "You have to be careful when wearing leggings," muses Jones in a fashion review of the year. "I bought a silver pair by Les Chiffoniers for £585 to wear on Christmas Day, but made sure I wore them under a sheer chiffon skirt, and a grey cashmere sweater; even so, my nephew hung a chocolate Santa on me, thinking I was the tree."

1 January: "2007 was the year of the airhead, a 12-month period when no bit of female fluff was too fatuous to be brought to our attention," muses Jones. "Want some proof that we women have finally abandoned all pretence to having any sort of gravitas, or moral responsibility, or intellectual debate?" The *Mail* provides it with 1,500 further words spilled directly from Jones's brain.

2 Jan: "I'm in the hinterland of Exmoor, visiting my ex-wife over New Year," pipes up a familiar voice in the *Evening Standard.* Nirpal Dhaliwal – for it is he – has some original observations of his own to make about the countryside. "The nearest shops are five miles away… all I smell is dung… looking after animals is hard work." Even worse, "the country has completely changed her. Out here, she's lost her metropolitan chic and clomps around in outsized Wellingtons, muddy jodhpurs and a weird ensemble consisting of a pinstripe waistcoat, tweed blazer and a liberty bodice" (*she's done this bit – Ed*).

3 Jan: "Have you ever seen such a glum, humourless, overdressed, stilted, self-conscious couple in your life?" demands Jones. Not her and Dhaliwal, stoopid – the Beckhams, a photograph of whom she spends 1,000 words dissecting. "We can only guess at what has caused him to go grey almost overnight such that it shines out from the dyed blond hair on the rest of his head. But I suppose his wife might have something to do with it?... The way she has her hand in her husband's is a bit odd, and comes across as rather needy."

6 Jan: Not only is everyone else having kids, they insist on bloody well feeding them too, observes our woman in the £585 leggings. "Rare is the school-age child in this country who has ever been allowed to experience hunger… I have a friend with three young children who admits to spending more than £400 a week on food. There is no longer any concept that you might make do towards the end of the week."

7 Jan: "What will be my number one style resolution for 2008?" muses Jones. "I must look at myself long and hard in a full-length mirror." Expect full and excruciating details of exactly what she observes over the next twelve months.

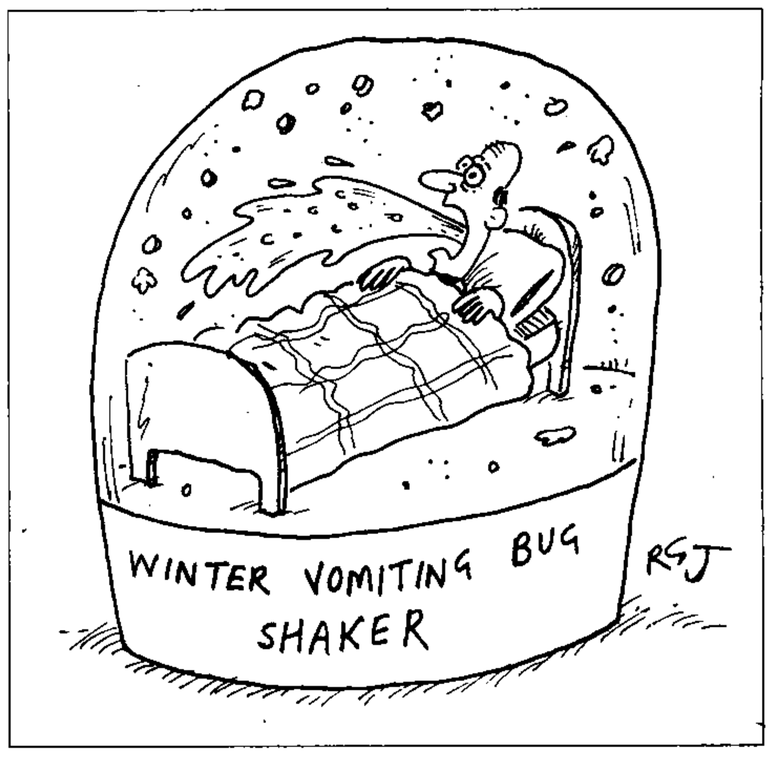
NUMBER CRUNCHING

$20 Price per barrel of oil which Rupert Murdoch predicted as his reason for backing Iraq war in 2003

$100 Price per barrel of oil after nearly five years of Iraq war

The people the world has chosen to forgot

The Guardian Weekly



GORDON'S GONGS 2008

GORDON BROWN promised last summer that his first new year honours list would reward Britain's "unsung heroes". And so it proved.

Open arms trade

One such hero is **Alan Garwood**, outgoing head of the Defence Export Sales Organisation (DESO) at the MoD, who was questioned under caution in the Serious Fraud Office's investigation into BAE System's Saudi business. Garwood was "seconded" to the DESO job from a BAE subsidiary, had his salary topped up by arms firms, and is likely to return to BAE – clutching a well-merited CBE.

Gordon has clearly inherited his predecessor's reverence for powerful defence contractors. He also gave a CBE to **Murray Easton**, boss of BAE's "Submarine Solutions" division, whose triumphs include Astute Class subs, which are £1.22bn over budget. And there was an OBE for **Vic Emery**, boss of BAE's "Surface Fleet Solutions". He is in charge of the Type 45 Destroyer, which is a mere £989m over budget and three years late.

Allan Cook, boss of arms firm Cobham, got a CBE in recognition of his firm's achievements in arming the Saudis, while an OBE went to senior QinetiQ executive **Dolores Brown**, who has the job of flogging QinetiQ kit to the public sector. As the company was already the government's main supplier of James Bond gear before its notorious privatisation, this can't be too arduous a task. Still, well worth a bauble.

Lost in the details

More heroic still is **Richard Summersgill**, director of child benefit and tax credits at the Revenue. Rightly ignoring the disastrous performance of those tax credits and the loss of the child benefit records, the PM gave him a CBE. After all, as recent parliamentary answers revealed, these little problems didn't stop Summersgill getting his bonuses, so why deprive him of a gong?

Former chief executive of the Nationwide **Philip Williamson** also picks up a CBE months after paying a £980,000 fine after years of failings led to customers' details being lost when a laptop went missing. Another Nationwide director, **Richard Handover**, gets the same gong after years at the helm of WH Smith until 2005 when he joined the Royal Mail board soon before it turned over scores of post offices to, er, WH Smith!

Heavy vetting

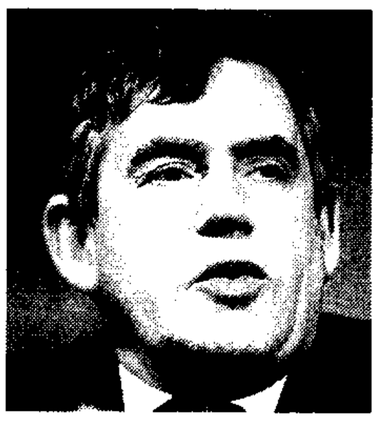
Meanwhile, as predicted in the last *Eye* there was a CBE for **Brigadier Andrew Warde**, the outgoing head of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps – who faces a civil case later this month on two counts of sexual discrimination against a female major in his department, who claims he tried to move her to a lower-ranking position outside his department after she became pregnant. How brave of the MoD to pre-empt the tribunal's verdict with such a conspicuous vote of confidence!

Sporting all-rounder

In the world of sport, the wealthy businessman and athletics commentator **Brendan Foster** received a CBE to complement his previous MBE. He was billed in the citation as "founder, Great North Run", but this scarcely does justice to his multi-tasking skills. He is also the chairman and controlling shareholder of Nova International, the company that promotes the race and sells the broadcasting rights to the BBC – and, for good measure, he co-presents the TV coverage, even though BBC guidelines state clearly that "presenters, reporters and production staff should have no substantial connection with products and firms featured in the stories they are covering".

Knight club

And so to the greatest heroes of all – Gordon's gallant knights of the realm. On 29 December the *FT* made special mention of the knighthood for **Ian McAllister**, "credited with improving Network Rail 'beyond recognition' since he was appointed chairman of the network operator in 2002". Alas! By 2 January Network Rail was facing a multi-million pound fine for failing to complete its Christmas holiday engineering works on time, sabotaging the travel plans of hundreds of thousands of passengers. Still, Gordon couldn't have predicted that, could he? Er, yes. Last summer Network Rail was fined £2.4m for failing to complete a new signalling scheme at Portsmouth on time. Other cock-ups led the rail regulator to describe Network Rail's performance as "exceptionally disappointing".



According to the citation, however, McAllister's honour was given "for services to transport".

And congratulations are due to the *Eye*'s favourite civil servant, **Bill Jeffrey**, on his overdue knighthood. Best known for presiding over a series of fiascos as head of the immigration and nationality directorate between 2002 and 2005, he is now doing equally sterling work as permanent secretary at the MoD. In the past two months alone he has twice been condemned by the public accounts committee – first for spending money on resurfacing tennis courts instead of improving the "unacceptable housing" provided for troops and their families, then for his pisspoor defence of the QinetiQ sell-off. After listening to Jeffrey's attempts to justify the vast sums trousered by QinetiQ bosses (and the even huger windfall grabbed by the Carlyle Group), committee chairman Edward Leigh told him: "You were just naïve babies in a sea of sharks." Shortly before Christmas Jeffrey also confessed to MPs that his ministry is set to miss official targets for troop readiness and manning levels. So… arise, Sir Bill!

In society's debt

Last but not least to the shops, where at the end of a year when the economy teetered amid record personal debt, the retail industry that swallowed much of it was well rewarded (not surprising as the committee deciding business honours was chaired by Dixons chairman Sir John Collins). For services to excessive consumer spending and making every high street look the same, CBEs went to **Maurice Bennett**, founder of Oasis among others, and **Richard Bradbury**, chief executive of River Island. Top shopkeeper was **Stuart Rose** of M&S, knighted in the year that Brown promised "British jobs for British workers" for turning round the chain by importing stock rather than using British suppliers.

The bankers financing the credit boom are represented by Lloyds TSB's finance director **Helen Weir**, with a CBE. Her main claim to fame hitherto had been picking up a £330,000 relocation payment for moving 40 miles when a director of B&Q. Alas, failures exposed in the "light touch" regulation of the City through the Northern Rock disaster might have cost retired FSA chief executive **John Tiner** his K. Unlike his predecessor, who became Sir Howard Davies, Tiner has to settle for the more modest CBE.

"I'm sorry, Mr Dumpty, you'll have to treat yourself"

LIFE AFTER PREZZA

FORGET the American primaries: the most exotic electoral contest over the next couple of months will be the race to succeed John Prescott as Labour candidate for the rock-safe seat of Hull East.

By the deadline on 31 December, no fewer than 31 hopefuls had applied. It seems safe to predict that much blood will be spilled before the winner is selected in mid-March. But the whiffy Prezza legacy may linger on.

One applicant is local councillor Steven Bayes, who was regarded as a leading contender until Labour suspended him before Christmas following his arrest in Belfast on suspicion of gross indecency. He hasn't been charged and insists he is still a serious candidate; the party which suspended him may not agree.

Another front-runner is John Prescott's son David, a London-based PR wallah who only two months ago dismissed speculation that he might stand as "press prattle". In his application, leaked to the *Hull Daily Mail* on new year's day, Prezza junior vowed to "strengthen our communities" and "reconnect with the voters", which rather begs the question of what his dad was doing during his decade as deputy PM.

David Prescott also boasts of his "detailed understanding of how government works". Might this refer to the Commons press pass his dad gave him in 2006? Or the £11m which his PR firm Geronimo won in contracts from the Department of Education in recent years? One of the contracts, fittingly enough, was to publicise a "Dads and Sons" campaign to get fathers more involved in their sons' education.

Another front-runner is former Shipley MP Chris Leslie. But he too looks a bit shop-soiled after being caught up in last month's Donorgate scandal: he admitted that while working as Gordon Brown's campaign manager he had suggested to Harriet Harman's team that they might seek a donation from Janet Kidd, secretary to generous Tyneside moneybags David Abrahams.

Yet another contender is Karl Turner, an up-and-coming Hull lawyer who also has strong Prezza connections: his father, former councillor Ken Turner, is one of John Prescott's closest friends.

But these white, middle-aged males will have their work cut out to reach the shortlist of six, which will be chosen at the end of February. The list must include at least three women and one person who is "black or ethnic minority", leaving just two places to be fought over by the rest. This improves the chances of George McNamara, nephew of Hull North's former MP Kevin McNamara, who counts as "ethnic minority" through his part-Asian ancestry. But the main beneficiaries will be the women. Foremost among them is one Della Georgeson, a dead-cert for the shortlist.

A refreshing break with the Prescott era? Not entirely. Ms Georgeson is currently to be found in Westminster, where she has long worked as Commons secretary to, er, the Rt Hon John Prescott MP.

CALLED TO ORDURE

FOR MANY months people who work at the Palace of Westminster have watched in weary resignation as builders have farted about "at work" on the new Commons Visitor Reception building.

Given that parliament is the hub of the nation's administrative affairs, the place which (supposedly) makes sure public money spent on projects elsewhere in the country is not wasted, how is the construction of this zingy new Visitor Centre going? Er, not well.

Tory MP David Amess decided to try to find out what was going on. In a written question he asked the House of Commons commission – the body, run by Speaker Martin, which runs the Palace – when it expected the Visitor Reception to open. What was the expected cost of the new building (a) at the start of the building work; (b) on 1 January 2006; (c) on 1 January 2007 and (d) on 1 November 2007. And what was the final cost expected to be? Amess had to wait until the very last day of Commons business before the Christmas recess for an answer – a day, by venerable custom, when government departments and official bodies sneak out awkward information. The task of answering the question fell to Nick Harvey, a soppingly wet Lib Dem who sits on the commission.

Hansard records his answer. "The works were originally planned to be completed on 8 September 2006 and we now expect the site to be handed over to the Houses before Christmas 2007. The building is expected to open in early 2008. An exact date will be announced in the new year.

"The original cost for the visitor reception building (which was part of a wider project of works in the Westminster Hall area) stated in the business case was £8,687,500. Work started on 9 January 2006. On 1 January 2007 the estimated cost was £8,727,500. Taking into account the delay and remedial work, by 1 November 2007 the cost was estimated at £11,200,000. While this is now expected to be the total cost of the building, some additional equipment will cost up to £250,000. Professional fees for completing the project and reviewing the lessons learned may add about £1m more to the total cost."

So: another triumph for the building trade which has nudged a figure of about £8.6m up to £11.2m, plus an extra million quid for our friends in the consultancy class to "review the lessons learned".

Perhaps the only lessons to be learned are that MPs are hopeless at keeping to budgets, and that when it comes to public projects builders' estimates should never be swallowed.

'Gavel Basher'

SMELLS OF Wii

LIKE Soviet citizens desperate for news that a supply of cabbages was heading their way, British parents waited to hear that Nintendo Wiis would be in their shops by Christmas. Invariably, they were disappointed. Nintendo sold 50,000 in one day in early December and didn't have the stock to replace them.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of parents thought they had no reason to fret because they had ordered their Wiis over the net from Ozone Electronics which operated from an address in Goldwick, Oldham. In return for £223, they received the assurance that delighted smiles would light up their children's faces on Christmas morning.

The first to post a warning was Nicola Hobson, a mother of two boys. She ordered a Wii on 23 November. On a visit to Argos a couple of days later, she noticed that it had Nintendos in stock. She brought one and tried to cancel her Ozone order. On 16 December she wrote on an Amazon consumer bulletin board that Ozone "confirmed cancellation via email on the same day but took the money on Friday!"

With Christmas coming, other parents were starting to worry. "I ordered a Wii back in November. I have to admit the alarm bells started ringing when they stopped taking phone calls," wrote one. "I would like to know if anyone has actually received any goods from this company," added a second.

Finally Mark Jones, who had been waiting a month for the Wii he had paid for, got in his car and drove to Oldham. "Sorry to break the already obvious news to everyone on here, but Ozone Electronics has scammed everyone who has purchased a Wii from them, including me," he wrote.

Jones found a "run down old building that looked like it has ceased trading a long time ago. Smashed windows, back driveway full of junk and a huge broken gate. Ozone Electronics doesn't operate from their advertised building now, if they ever did at all! Sorry to those who have lost money due to these scumbags."

A north London mother told the *Eye* she ordered one Wii and had two payments taken from her account. She had used a debit rather than a credit card, and her bank, the Halifax, says there is little chance she will get her money back.

After visiting Oldham, Mark Jones stoutly declared: "I hope these dogs can be caught!" Some hope. As the *Eye*'s City columnist "Slicker" keeps pointing out, the "light touch regulation" Gordon Brown once boasted of means the dogs can run wild and everyday conmen can swindle with virtual impunity.

Doubters should speak to the owners of Biotinic and Vitamail, who have proved how easy it is to rip off the British. Both send personalised junk mail announcing to the recipient "You have won £10,000." All they have to do to receive their windfall is place an order for medically worthless vitamin supplements and New Age "complementary" medicines.

Biotonic and Vitamail's bogus jackpots have been exposed by the media so often that financial hacks yawn when their names come up. At least the French have taken action. Biotonic was based in Lille, until a court action in late 2003 fined its founder, Claude Francois, €30,000 (£20,300), gave him a suspended prison sentence and drove his company to Belgium. Although the Advertising Standards Authority wrings its hands, the British authorities do nothing to stop him sending 1m mailings a month to Britain via the Royal Mail and generating 4,000 orders a day from credulous punters.

'Ratbiter'

"I know I failed to get you a Wii player for Christmas, but the neighbours don't – so wave that remote around"

Down on the Farm

FEW organisations have a more saintly image in Britain than the RSPCA. And, as the RSPCA well knows, nothing is more likely to keep the bequests rolling in from kindly old ladies than publicity surrounding shocking cases of animal cruelty in which the RSPCA's inspectors have heroically intervened.

The penny is dropping, however, that these RSPCA officials are not always so saintly as they seem.

Among those with reason to know this better than most are livestock farmers, some of whom were so shocked by the RSPCA's investigative methods that they got together some years back to form the SHG, or Self Help Group, to assist anyone against whom the RSPCA is trying to cobble together an unwarranted prosecution. Before Christmas two more cases highlighted by the SHG again shed highly unfavourable light on the RSPCA's curious techniques.

Before Portsmouth magistrates, the RSPCA prosecuted a kennel maid at a Wickham kennels, along with her two employers. The RSPCA ensured that its allegations of wilful cruelty to a dog named Buster received widespread coverage. It claimed in court that the animal had been deprived of water and not given a "nutritionally balanced diet". But to the increasing concern of the magistrates, Nigel Weller, the solicitor acting for the defence, directed his cross-examination at how the prosecution had assembled its case.

It became clear during the six-day trial that the kennel maid had only been interviewed at her home and in a highly unsatisfactory fashion. The RSPCA inspector, Janet Edwards, one of its two chief witnesses – the other was an RSPCA vet – had not used a tape recorder but relied only on notes she had written up. The accused had not been told of the nature of her alleged offences or that she had the right to have a solicitor present during the interview.

Even more seriously, Mr Weller dragged out of the witnesses that they and other RSPCA staff had discussed their evidence in advance (what the RSPCA called "the usual case conference"). As every criminal lawyer knows, such meetings with witnesses to discuss a case are strictly unlawful. The magistrates were highly critical on all these points, ruling that no proper evidence had been produced, and acquitted the accused of all charges. Their verdict attracted much less press interest than the lurid allegations made by the RSPCA before and during the trial.

Mr Weller exposed a similar story when defending a woman before a district judge in Harwich on charges of having deprived her cats of "adequate nutrition" and "adequate veterinary care". As emerged from orders given by the court, the RSPCA's chief witness had produced two contradictory reports. Her first made no mention of the animals not being given proper food or veterinary treatment, or even that they were suffering at all. The second had only been written, it emerged, after other RSPCA officials had given her a pro-forma set of allegations obviously used in other cases before. Again the judge was extremely critical of this unlawful "witness coaching", finding the accused not guilty on all charges.

After the case Mr Weller warned any lawyers taking on the RSPCA not to allow any evidence it produces to be taken at face value. Old ladies thinking of leaving money to the RSPCA in their wills, please note.

'Muckspreader'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"HOUSE PRICES FALL AGAIN"
Daily Express, 28 December

"HOUSE PRICES RISING AGAIN"
Daily Express, 29 December

The One and Only (BBC1)
Big Brother: Celebrity Hijack (C4/E4)

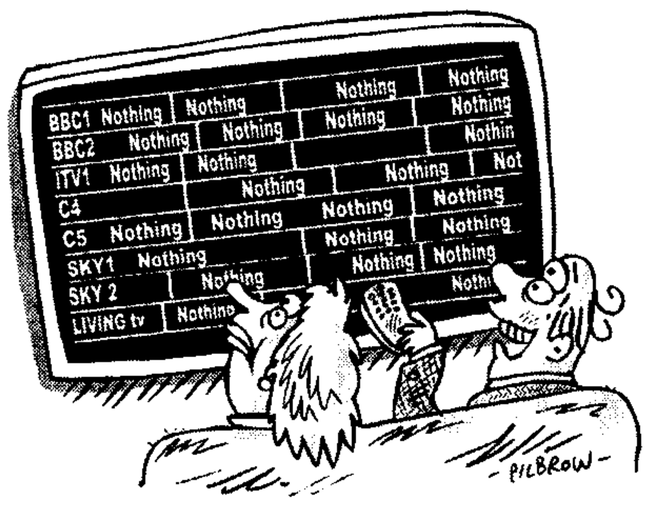
IF executives had their way, absolutely everyone appearing on television would be a celebrity. We see this trend, for example, in the way that major documentaries about Afghanistan, which would once have been fronted by Robert Kee or Charles Wheeler, are presented these days by Ross Kemp.

Another example is the way in which the kind of series which were intended to get ordinary people on to the box – such as *Big Brother* and *The X-Factor* – rapidly spawned equivalents for the recognisable: *Celebrity Big Brother*, *Strictly Come Dancing*. The bosses were reluctant even to wait the few weeks it took for *The X Factor* or *Pop Idol* to turn a wannabe into someone the *Sun* writes about.

But there's a problem. Only a small number and a certain kind of celeb – phone not ringing, alimony to pay, etc – will take part in these contests, especially since the last *Celebrity Big Brother* ended with a police investigation into racism. So the desperate execs have to find other ways of getting celebs on screen. Two of these cheesy manoeuvres can be seen in the new year schedules.

Solution number one is to get non-famous wannabes to pretend to be famous people. Admittedly, ITV did this for years as *Stars in their Eyes*; but the BBC is the first to do it with the full post-Simon Cowell palaver of elimination rounds and studio juries. As the title for a talent contest featuring tribute bands, **The One and Only** is obviously terrifically clever and ironic, although there's always the risk that viewers will reflect on the unintended extra irony that the name is being applied to the zillionth knock-out series for wannabes to hit the screen in recent months.

Actually, whether or not the producers panicked about lack of originality, they've panicked about something because the show oozes with signs of confusion. *Radio Times* claimed that the two separate editions on the opening Saturday night would be divided between male and female acts; but when it came to it, the exhibitionists were mixed up, Frank Sinatra soundalikes alternating with the Madonna ones and so on.



"Let's see what's on..."

Also, the first programme literally started twice. A voice-over about how Las Vegas was the absolute home of the tribute act was followed by host Graham Norton driving around the gambling strips, delivering almost exactly the same script over remarkably similar pictures.

Then, unfortunately, the proceedings started for real. There was the usual cruel and gratuitous sequence of rejected entrants, such as 21-stone baldies convinced they were impersonating Freddie Mercury, condemning the self-deluded and the care-in-the-community to a future of humiliation on YouTube. Next, "voice coaches David and Carrie Grant", who've been knocking around these formats since *Pop Idol*, gave tuition to the finalists before they performed in front of a jury of "superfans", the kind of people who have seen Madonna 300 times.

As always, the most astonishing thing was the seriousness with which everyone took it. "The way she held her microphone was a mirror image of Madonna on the Like a Virgin '85 tour," frothed one of the saddos as someone with half the voice of Mrs Ritchie and three times the waist cavorted on stage. "This is probably the best moment of my life!" wept the salesman who had been voted least completely unlike Frank Sinatra.

What's terrifying is that shows such as *The X Factor* automatically send their winners to the top of the charts. Are we really going to get a tribute act at number one? And where will television go next? Will the next talent show involve members of the public competing to present one of these things, giving us their Brucie or their Graham Norton? From the look of horror on Norton's face throughout *The One and Only*, he would happily hand over stewardship of this series to an impersonator straight away.

With anyone we've heard of who isn't in rehab or jail refusing to appear in Celebrity Big Brother, Channel 4 has tried to hang on to at least a fraction of the ratings and advertising revenue with **Big Brother: Celebrity Hijack**, in which the house-mates are unknowns – although allegedly selected for intelligence or skills – but a few people the audience might recognise get to play Big Brother, setting challenges for the contestants. The first one in was Matt Lucas.

As everyone might have guessed, except a channel threatened with the loss of its biggest cash-cow, it doesn't work because Big Brother has always been a minor character in proceedings. So what we get is the usual hours of twentysomethings circling each other sexually, while the sound is suddenly dulled when they mention the time they met that footballer. The celebs lined up to follow Lucas as Big Brother should urgently contact *The One and Only* to see if they can get a stand-in to, er, stand in.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

IT'S just over a year since the satellite channel Al Jazeera English launched in Doha after assembling an ambitious team of some 500 hacks, all keen to enjoy the billion-dollar patronage of the Emir of Qatar.

Everything ran smoothly until the emir's money began to run out. Now the journos are in open revolt: "People who have been responsible for this phenomenal innovation in the world of broadcasting have been treated like shit. Yes, you heard right – like shit!" reports one hackette on an expat blog.

Despite extravagant launch promises, salaries have actually gone down, forcing staff to borrow money to pay their rent. Those who tried to leave the country in despair found they first had to clear their debts and close their bank accounts. That required the collection of several different official signatures, which takes time when you're working in a corrupt police state.

A lucky few have been offered a two-month bonus to leave quietly. Sadly they cannot receive the money until the signatures have been gathered and their Qatari accounts are closed. So they've been forced to cash their bankers drafts in the souk, stuffing their dosh into suitcases before the long trip back to the BBC to see if their old jobs are still available. Very few of them are.

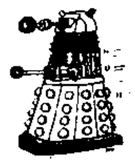
WINE-LOVING John Scammell has resigned as GMTV's managing editor after being found slumped over his desk before Christmas (see last *Eye*).

He was encouraged to go freelance after his boozy antics were publicised around the world, with even *Yes! Weekly* in Gainsborough, North Carolina, christening him: "The king of the office Christmas party."

Scummell, 46, put on a brave face in his valedictory email to staff. "I will miss the enormous amount of friends I have made at GMTV." Would they be the ones who had tried to rouse him from alcohol-induced slumber by calling his phone, and started singing "Ring My Bell" as he slept on? Or the ones whom he himself made so happy by enabling them to "go freelance" in the past?

"I hope that some of the fun that I have tried to bring to the company remains long after I have gone." Would that be the fun that persuaded reporter Louise Port to sue the company for half a million pounds for disability discrimination? Her industrial tribunal resumes shortly, with deputy editor Malcolm Douglas having spent Christmas looking forward to having his reputation as a caring manager further dissected by some of the sharpest Rumpoles around. Is it any wonder GMTV execs are hitting the bottle?

BIRTSPEAK



"We wanted to build the foundation and DNA of the new site in line with the ongoing trend and evolution of the internet towards dynamically generated and syndicable content."

– Richard Titus, BBC

DUMB BRITAIN

Richard Lewis show, BBC Radio Bristol

Richard: EMI sacked which band after their appearance on the Today show.?

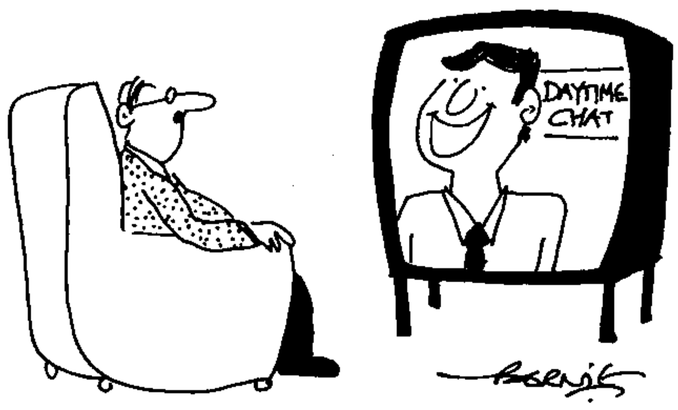
Contestant: Oh erm... was he the one that was in Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here?

Richard: Ooh, close!

Contestant: I'm gonna go for the Bay City Rollers.

Richard: Which film released in 1984 starred Sigourney Weaver as a possessed cellist with a portal in her fridge?

Contestant: Was it "I Am A Possessed Cellist With A Portal In My Fridge"?



"...And my celebrity guests today are all less famous than you!"

APPEARING on Radio 4's *The Message* after Christmas, the BBC's "director of vision" Jana Bennett was clear as to what the benefits of a digi-box could be.

"Looking at the really special experience is what makes you stand out in multi-channel. Look at a smaller channel like BBC3 – the *Liverpool Nativity* gets three quarters of a million people watching because it's original, and live, and you don't want to miss it because it's not something that exists as a repeatable thing, like, say, cartoons are."

Er... unless you count the repeat of the show on BBC1 a week later, that is. And how many people watched that? Nearly 1.2m.

THE BBC has found a novel use for its BBC Club Sports ground at Motspur Park in Surrey.

After the private company running it had its contract terminated, the BBC sold the site to developers who intend to turn it into... a graveyard!

AD NAUSEAM

THE ad industry would have you believe that 2007 was the year of Cadbury's Gorilla.

That one surreal vignette (think man in gorilla suit drumming Phil Collins) was hailed as proof that UK advertising *can* harness the viral power of the internet, being both talked about and effective.

Amid this orgy of backslapping, *Marketing* magazine's list of ads that achieved the highest recall among consumers last year makes fascinating reading. The magazine measured TV adverts that hit home across the year, and also in any one week. And the truth is that shit floats. Top of the pile was PC World's purple-shirted pap, followed by a depressing roster of celeb-driven dross including Asda, Morrisons, Tesco and B&Q.

In the single-week recall table it was even worse, with Esure spin-off Sheila's Wheels, Churchill and Iceland among the best in class. Cadbury's didn't even make the list.

The conclusion? Huge blitzes of irritating dreck adorned with a well-known face and contagious jingle are still the lifeblood of British TV advertising. Add to this a forthcoming ban on alcohol ads, the England football team's failure to qualify for the European championships (which has knocked at least 20 percent from the summer's choicest TV slots) and the continuing decline of the TV advertising market as a whole, and 2008 looks grim for adland.

Never mind, at least Britain's junk foodies have turned over a new leaf: before Christmas, 11 companies including Burger King, Coca-Cola, Kelloggs, Mars, Nestle, PepsiCo and Unilever signed up to a voluntary "EU Pledge" not to advertise unhealthy food and drink to children under 12.

All very heartening. But why now? Could it be because Markos Kyprianou, the EU's health and consumer affairs commissioner, has been telling the industry repeatedly to stop flogging junk to kids or face legislation? Or could it be Ofcom's ban on advertising to children, which came into effect here last February and looks likely to cause similar action across Europe?

Given that the companies allowed themselves a year's grace (their "pledge" comes into effect on 31 December 2008), the move looks like a typical new year's resolution: sounds good at the start of the year and then falls to bits by the end of January...

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IT BEING new year and all, I shall be charitable and describe English National Opera's recent history as accident-prone. Others would find stronger words for the near-unbroken succession of failures, flops and also-rans that have occupied the Coliseum stage since last summer.

The disasters started with the desperately awful *Kismet* and plumbed ever new depths with a lamentable *Carmen*, a risible *Coronation of Poppea* and a camp, am-dram *Aida* that ENO only staged because it came with (as it turned out, utterly ill-judged) designs by Zandra Rhodes.

That ENO has been so seduced by non-operatic "celebrity" names like Rhodes and Sally Potter (director of the *Carmen*) in its desperate attempts to fill seats, is part of the reason the company is in such an artistic mess. And things are getting messy again with the *Merry Widow* scheduled to open in May.

For months now ENO has been making a song and dance about the fact that this new production would be staged by everybody's favourite former Yorkshire Playhouse director-cum-South Bank boss-cum-London Olympics cultural coordinator Jude Kelly, with a new English translation by broadcaster Sandi Toksvig and Fascinating Aida's Dillie Keane. All very showbiz, very street-cred: Outreach with a capital O and exclamation marks.

Alas last week ENO quietly revealed that, er, Jude Kelly had withdrawn from the show for "family reasons" to be replaced at this late stage by the creaky (but reliable) opera veteran John Copley. Toksvig and Keane's spotlit names have meanwhile disappeared into the ether with no explanations – merely a short statement that the English translation will be by Jeremy Sams.

Kelly's withdrawal is perhaps not so surprising. Unkind critics had been questioning her ability to go chasing freelance work when she already had more than enough to do (and more than enough payment for it) in her other roles. But the air-brushing of Toksvig and Keane (who only the other day was getting plugs for the *Widow* on BBC radio) is a mystery about which ENO is staying tight-lipped. The only certain thing is that from being a calculatedly high-profile show, it's suddenly become a rather low one. But all for the wrong reasons.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

THE DJ, THE BLOGGER AND THE HACK IN A HUFF

AS Fleet Street raked over the death of former Radio One DJ Kevin Greening last week, *Mail on Sunday* hack Daniel Cochlin stumbled on an exciting new lead. There was a tribute to Greening on a blog called Botherer, run by freelance journalist John Walker, which mentioned that Walker had known him slightly years ago.

Cochlin sent an urgent email asking Walker "what Kevin's address was and who his partner was. All info would obviously be treated in the strictest confidence and we do offer cash for info received". Walker politely declined, explaining that he didn't want to assist the *MoS* with a sensationalist piece about the death of a man he admired.

"I respect your views and understand your concerns," replied Cochlin, smooth as mayonnaise. "It is clear that Kevin was a popular man, and we would like to track down the truth. You may find that hard to believe, but I have never worked for a paper which checks and re-checks its facts so well. You say we/I write a lot of gossip, in fact I detest gossip and deal in hard facts and evidential news. You may still feel you do not want to give me the info, but it would be the best way for the truth to come out."

Perhaps Cochlin didn't realise that his previous *MoS* pieces could easily be looked up on the web. Walker duly did so, and wrote this unimprovable riposte: "I'm sure that the debate over the age of model Agyness Deyn, or Lily Allen's concerns about Posh Spice's fame, are the very hardest of facts. And it's good to know that whether the Crispy Pancake seller is sleeping over at Fergie's isn't gossip... I'm not an idiot. I know that you couldn't give a fuck how Greening died, or who was involved. You, understandably, want a good story and a scoop. But you can't be fooling yourself with lines like, 'the best way for the truth to come out'. Yes – I'm certain that Kevin's family, his former partner, the police, and just about everyone are desperately hoping that the *MoS* will be the ones to break the news, in its famously warm and delicate fashion. I'd like to venture the suggestion that the 'best way for the truth to come out' would be a police investigation. I'm not shocked or offended that you're sniffing around this corpse. It's your job, and I understand how it works. But I do take offence at your mendacious comments. If I find out that John Prescott has two teatimes in a day, however, you'll be the first to know."

Apparently forgetting that it was he who had approached Walker rather than vice versa, the *MoS* hack threw a glorious tabloid tantrum. "Well aren't we the clever one?" he emailed back. "I've got the info elsewhere so spare me your 'expertise' on journalism matters. Get a job, get a life and I might respect what you say slightly more." Diddums!

GOING LIVE

OVER to Radio Four's *Today* programme on 5 January for a report inspired by the *Times*'s list of the 50 greatest British authors.

Presenter Sarah Montague went live for an opinion from Jan Morris but was perhaps a little premature.

"I haven't seen the paper yet," said Morris. "I haven't got up yet."

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

NAOMI CAMPELL TO INTERVIEW FIDEL CASTRO!
BUT ISN'T THE HARSH DICTATOR OLD AND INFIRM AND NEARLY FINISHED?
YES, BUT SHE TRIES HARD!

MEDICINE BALLS

World Class Commissioning

WHO had the greatest influence on NHS policy and practice in 2007? According to the *Health Service Journal*, it was David "Nibbler" Nicholson, the NHS chief executive. Professor Lord "I'm not a politician, just a humble surgeon" Darzi came in second, with Mark "Who he?" Britnell, director-general of commissioning, pipping Health Secretary Alan "Postie" Johnson for third.

Perhaps the most telling statistic of the *HSJ*'s annual top 50, other than it being populated with people no one's ever heard of, is that there were 26 new entries. Any business that cleared out more than half its top management every year would struggle to survive; but good ship NHS somehow stays afloat in a sea of continuous change of policy and personnel.

Some people had to go: John Reid oversaw an obscene spending spree in the NHS, leaving Patsy Hewitt to carry the can for the record debt. The junior doctor job fiasco (set to be repeated next year) did for BMA boss James Johnson and severely weakened chief medical officer Liam Donaldson, which left room for the rise of Darzi's surgical specialisation plans with a catchy report, *From Saws and Scalpels to Lasers and Robots*.

But it's the rise of Britnell, described as "half of Nibbler's brain", that's most notable.

Britnell is clearly ambitious. He was chief executive of University Hospital Birmingham at the age of 34 and oversaw a huge PFI project (he keeps a model of the building on his desk). Many in the NHS, including Britnell, see him as a future chief executive; but he's been handed the "Northern Ireland" job of sorting out commissioning. The NHS underperforms every year because primary care trusts – which hold more than 80 percent of the NHS budget – don't get good enough value for the services they purchase.

On entering the DoH, Britnell endeared himself to everyone by announcing that he would work out what needed to be done in his first 30 days and how to do it in the next 30. The answer? "World class commissioning". This phrase is now parroted endlessly by just about everyone in the

"It's good to see Dad keeping his mind active"

HSJ Top 50 – but no one knows what it means. According to Britnell, it includes "a Framework for procuring External Support for Commissioners (FESC), which is part of the 'buy' option, providing PCTs with easy access to a bank of specialist expertise in areas such as data analysis, contract management and public engagement…"

The FESC is just an excuse for clueless PCTs to buy the "expertise" of huge for-profit health insurance corporations. In America, these organisations keep costs down by offering doctors perverse incentives to deny patients the care they need (600,000 doctors have been sued for this) and there are widespread legal claims for misapplying fee schedules, errors in claims processing and delayed payments.

PCTs need to commission for the benefit of patients rather than to cut costs or maximise profits. They could start by refusing to pay hospitals for "foreseen and avoidable" complications or illnesses. For example, if a patient developed a deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolus after surgery, and hadn't received adequate prophylaxis, the hospital would have to pay for the treatment (as well as the law suit). Likewise, if a patient was admitted to hospital just to hit a government casualty waiting target (currently costing the NHS £2bn a year), the PCT would only pay if there was proof that the admission was clinically necessary. If PCTs only paid for treatments where hospitals and GPs could show that patients had benefited, the unproven political guff would disappear and the NHS might actually improve. Just a thought.

M.D.

MENTAL HEALTH

MORE on community mental health nurse Karen Reissmann, who after 25 years' service was suspended by NHS bosses in Manchester on the same day she gained promotion (*Eye* 1190).

The disciplinary action against 48-year-old Ms Reissmann had nothing to do with the nursing job she loved (she had just been made a senior psychiatric nurse) but followed her union activities which had upset bosses at Manchester's Mental Health and Social Care Trust.

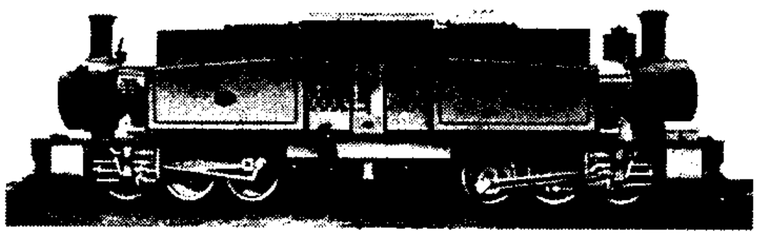
The trigger was an interview Ms Reissmann gave expressing concern about privatisation and the decision to transfer some services to the voluntary sector to cut costs. Citing the example of the "assertive outreach" teams (who work with the city's most chaotic and worrying patients) being handed to the voluntary sector, she suggested there was a risk of lower standards of care from less experienced staff.

The trust claimed Ms Reissmann was damaging its reputation, undermining confidence in herself and misusing her nursing time. After news of her suspension broke, the trust then added a raft of preposterous new charges: speaking out about the suspension; telling everyone she was innocent; and allowing the press to "print misleading statements about her case". She was then sacked.

Despite strike action by Unison colleagues to get her reinstated, and despite widespread support from patients and the public (they raised more than £200,000 hardship money), Ms Reissmann's appeal failed last month.

Backed by Unison she is now taking the trust to an employment tribunal. Before her bosses risk having to pay unlimited damages for trades union victimisation, they might want to look at an official report, available to anyone, on Manchester's local healthcare website. It echoes some of Ms Reissmann's concerns but uses arguably more forceful language. It even names one voluntary organisation running an assertive outreach programme, saying there has been a "worrying number of 'SUIs'" (or "serious and untoward incidents").

If officials can publicly express concern, why can't responsible union reps?



SIGNAL FAILURES

Rugby balls

NETWORK RAIL's new year fiasco that closed mainlines at Rugby and Liverpool Street could not have happened without the help of the US consultancy Bechtel and a ragbag of other engineering firms.

Fragmentation has long been a problem in the privatised rail industry, but Network Rail decided to keep on the contractors who were renewing infrastructure for Railtrack after it took maintenance in-house in 2003. Thus five engineering companies were involved over Christmas at Rugby alone. With several train operators also affected, corporate lawyers will be enjoying a feast of blaming and claiming.

On the West Coast upgrade, Bechtel consultants (*Eyes passim*) had been providing "support" to Railtrack since 1999, the latter's efforts to carry out the upgrade using sundry contractors already being in tatters. In September 2002 Bechtel was appointed project manager – but with no benchmark for measuring attainment (and after no competitive tendering).

Bechtel boasts of having turned the project round; but was it really an achievement to dump the daftest bits of Failtrack's plan and then spend another six years on the rest?

The £8bn project has had a bumpy ride under Bechtel and NR. Upgrading near Wilmslow took twice as long as planned in 2006, shutting the Crewe-Stockport line for over six months. Some works were postponed. NR chief Iain Coucher must have hoped people had forgotten that debacle last week, when he ruled out "knee-jerk" sacking of contractors after the Rugby chaos.

Despite its shortage of expert engineers for overhead power cables, NR scheduled major work for them at three places over Christmas. When it realised there weren't enough engineers to cover Rugby and the other jobs, it deferred work south of Peterborough and reopened the east-coast mainline on time. At Liverpool Street power cables needed reinstatement but engineers had been switched to Rugby.

For all Bechtel's expensive "expertise", the West Coast renewal is now in danger of missing another deadline. Extra and faster West Coast trains are scheduled from next December. The more cooks there are to spoil the broth, the greater the likelihood work will overrun, or be abandoned or deferred again to meet the deadline.

NEWS that Richard Branson pocketed £24m last year from Virgin Rail shows how generous Labour can be with taxpayers' money.

"After 10 years, it's time for a reward after all the risk that has been taken," Virgin Rail explained, apparently under the illusion that Beardie took some financial risk on his West Coast and Cross Country franchises. Many people thought the same in 1997, when Virgin and Railtrack agreed to upgrade the mainline from Euston with 140mph tilting Pendolino trains and high-tech signalling. Virgin would attract so many more passengers, it would pay higher charges to Railtrack for the improved infrastructure *and* £1.2bn of premium payments to the state over 10 years.

When the Virgin-Railtrack plan proved woefully unrealistic, Virgin blamed Railtrack (although Virgin was late introducing Pendolinos: see *Eye* 1083).

Instead of waving Beardie goodbye, the government waived the franchise deal and introduced "management contracts", guaranteeing annual profits no matter how badly Virgin performed. In December 2006 Virgin's West Coast franchise was "reinstated". The key element, wot won Beardie the franchise in 1997, had been the promised premium payments – but Labour didn't reinstate them. Instead it agreed a massive increase in Virgin's subsidy, which rocketed to 5.9p per passenger km in 2006-7 from 2.8p in 2005-6. Such was the effect of the higher subsidy kicking in more than halfway through 2006-7. This year's results should be as mouth-watering for Beardie as they're eye-watering for taxpayers.

In its winning franchise bids, Virgin agreed to pay the state £130m (at 1997 prices) in 2006-7 for the West Coast franchise and receive £6.9m subsidy for Cross Country; in the event West Coast got £221m subsidy and Cross Country £231m. Virgin's franchises *have* involved risk – but only for taxpayers and passengers who continue to pay dearly.

'Dr B Ching'

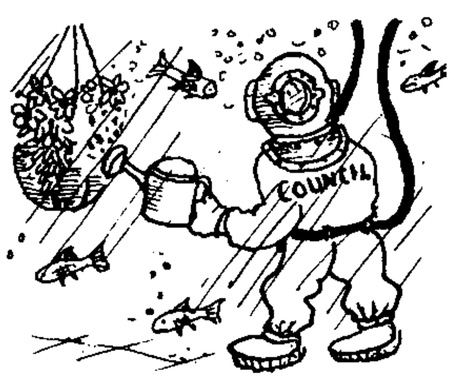
ROTTEN BOROUGHS AWARDS 2007

LAYDEES and chennlemen! Welcome once again to the Rotten Boroughs Awards, the glitziest event in the glamorous local government calendar! This year's "Night of the Brown Envelopes" was held in the Arghiros Suite at the King Alfred Centre, Hove, where the awards were due to be presented by actor Brad Pitt. Alas, Security had to be called when the audience became restive after it was discovered that the MC was not, indeed, the Hollywood actor but drama student Wayne Fanshawe, of Worthing. Fanshawe, 19, began to explain how he had been paid "50 quid by a shifty-looking bloke round the back of the town hall", but was driven off stage under a hail of ciabatta rolls before he could finish, and proceedings broke up in chaos. Happily a copy of the awards list was recovered from the floor, so here they are in full…

Democrat of the Year: With democracy under the spotlight in Pakistan and Kenya, it's good to see it in such rude health at home. In Foreign Secretary David Miliband's own constituency, for example, where **South Tyneside** council covered up for six months the fact that 18 ballot boxes had gone missing after the May local elections. And in **West Somerset**, where Tory candidate **Mike Padgett** was caught on tape offering to "dish the dirt" on a fellow Conservative if his Independent rival gave him a clear run. In **Bournemouth** Tory Alex Adams was elected on a platform of "fighting overdevelopment" while neglecting to tell voters about his own plans to get rich building blocks of flats. But the clear winner has to be former Labour councillor **Miranda Grell**, who successfully overturned her Lib Dem rival's solid majority on **Waltham Forest** council by falsely alleging while out canvassing that he was a paedophile, resulting in him having to move away from the area. After being fined for making false statements under the Representation of the People Act and disqualified for three years, Grell claimed she was the victim of a racially inspired conspiracy.

Porn Lover of the Year: Dishing out free computers to councillors may or may not have improved their performance, but it has certainly proved a boon to the mucky picture industry. *Highly commended*: Ashford council's Tory leader **Paul Clokie**, who on discovering in March that the council's £100,000-a-year regeneration supremo **Martin Bacon** was spending up to four hours a day pounding his, er, keyboard to download internet porn did not sack him but hushed the matter up until a local sleaze-busting website broke the story. *Winner*: For sheer devotion to perusing filth courtesy of the taxpayer, the award goes to the former Labour leader of **Swansea** city council, **Lawrence Bailey**, now sadly disqualified after "accidentally" downloading 80,000 images on to four separate hard disks.

Keep Calm and Carry On Award: To **Calderdale** council, West Yorks, which at the height of last summer's floods, caused by torrential rain, sent workers to water hanging baskets in the town of Elland.



Interesting Street Name: **Oswestry** council named a new road "Cae Onan", which, insofar as it means anything in Welsh, means "Wankers' Meadow". They probably meant Cae *Onnen* – "Ash Meadow".

Well-Deserved Promotion of the Year: Hampshire county council's new chief exec, **Andrew Smith**, who got his £210,000-a-year job shortly after being bollocked by the district auditor for illegally awarding £1.2m IT contracts without putting them out to tender. And a special **Blind Eye Award** to Hampshire's Tory leader **Ken "It's Only the Taxpayer's Money" Thornber** who endorsed a "disciplinary" whitewash which concluded Smith had done nothing wrong.

Bung of the Year: To **Bradford** BNP councillor **Paul Cromie**, who sent 210 pensioners Christmas cards containing £5 notes. The Standards Board for England felt this could be seen "as an inducement to vote for the BNP" (just fancy that!) but decided to do nothing about it because Cromie claimed he thought it was a form of charitable giving.

QUOTES OF THE YEAR

"Frankly, there is not much ideological difference to the way Conservative Westminster is run from Labour Newham" – **Sir Simon Milton**, leader of **Westminster** city council.

"A wildcat had come into his house and attacked his wife quite ferociously" – lawyer's explanation for why **South Norfolk** councillor **Keith Tilcock** came to be drunk and urinating in the grounds of Norwich hospital.

"Fuck off you slag" – what **Plymouth** Tory councillor **Andy Fox** was alleged to have said to a female motorist in a dispute over a parking space.

"Here come Twit and Twat" – Labour councillor **Doreen Jones** greets environmental objectors at community council meeting about gas pipeline project at **Cilfrew**, South Wales.

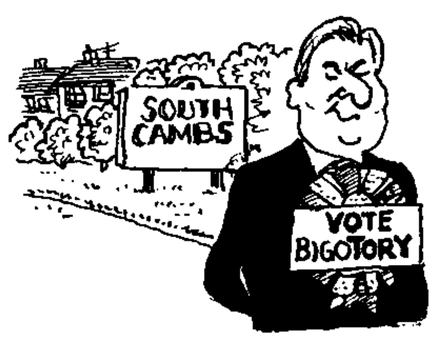
Penny Pincher of the Year: Southwark council, which wrote to widower Francis Weston, 84, and told him he risked eviction from his council home for owing 1p rent.

Antisocial Behaviour Initiative: Newham council's parks constabulary, who had a punch-up at their Christmas party after one "officer" accused a colleague of being "a raving homo".

Healthy Living Award: After the smoking ban came into force in July, **Copeland council** in Cumbria removed glass from bus shelters so passengers could still have a fag. Trouble was, it let the wind and the rain in, so they all got soaked. So back went the glass – plus "no smoking" signs.

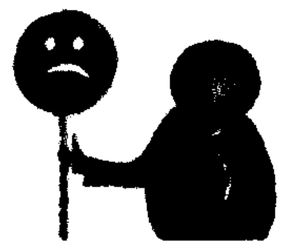
Crime Fighters of the Year: CCTV was installed by **Basingstoke** council outside a shopping centre to monitor a bike rack which suffered regular thefts. But the camera was positioned so its view was obscured by a tree. Instead of moving the camera, the council cut down the tree…

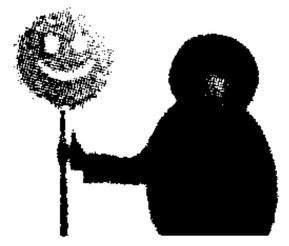
Tory Bigot of the Year: To prove how tolerant he was, **South Cambridgeshire** councillor **Ted Pateman** declared: "There are all sorts of wogs here – I don't differentiate between them but treat them all as if they were English." For his failure to realise that these days, more than ever, it ain't what you say but the way that you say it, Pateman, 79, had to resign.



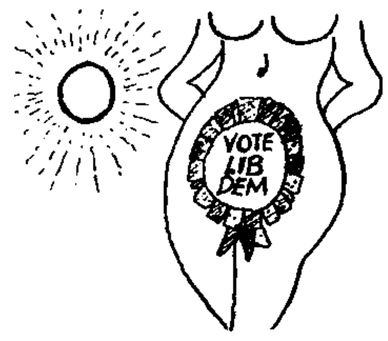
PR Team of the Year: Norwich city council's **Lynette Alcock and Richard Balls**. Lynette declared that "to avoid any Alcock and Balls hilarity" she would be using her married name, Day. Alas another colleague is called Lyall...

Political Correctness Award: Cambridge's former mayor John Hipkin was sacked from the planning committee after the council's Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Group accused him of "heterosexism". Hipkin's crime was to have called for more family homes to be built, which was, er, "insensitive" to gay and lesbian home buyers. But the winner is **Bromsgrove** district council which, after sending out idiotic postcards asking if residents felt "glad or grumpy", illustrated with cartoon characters holding "sad" and "smiley" balloons, panicked when it was pointed out that the one holding the "sad" balloon was black. The postcards were duly reprinted to make the black chap smiley and the white one sad.





Warming Balls Award: In an unseasonably mild February, **Lewes** Lib Dem councillor **Marina Pepper**, green fanatic, former Page 3 girl and "white witch", conceded that global warming does have its advantages: "I wear no underwear beneath my short cotton skirt." Alas, in May her constituents elected a Tory who limits emissions by keeping his pants *on*.



AND FINALLY...

Least Deserved Genuine Gong: To Kettering borough council chief executive **David Cook** who was awarded an MBE in the new year honours "for services to local government". *Eye* 1191 told how Cook drove a two-year campaign to blacken the reputation of the council's former "mayor's officer" and driver, Rick Hammond, who had 41 years unblemished service.

In 2005 Cook's new management team decided to get rid of Hammond, who faced a series of completely false allegations: stubbing a cigarette out on council property (he doesn't smoke); claiming pay for more hours than he'd worked (he proved the opposite was true); and stealing a can of petrol to put in his own car (er, which is a diesel).

Hammond was sacked and took the council to an employment tribunal, which found he was unfairly dismissed and awarded him £42,000. It took further legal action to get the council to pay up, eight months late. Result: a good man's name besmirched, his life savings swallowed up and his health ruined. Richly deserving of an honour from the Queen!

Tony Blair had a private meeting with the Pope earlier this year. Photo / Reuters

NZherald website

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE image chosen for English Heritage's Christmas card – Stonehenge in a snow-dusted landscape – was an unfortunate one this year. It appeared as EH awaited a government decision over a £470m road scheme on which plans for a new visitor centre for the monument depended.

It was thus a blow when, on 6 December, the government announced that the Highways Agency's A303 Stonehenge Improvement scheme would *not* go ahead because it was too expensive. So, after 20 years of indecision, feasibility studies, alternative road schemes, commissions for new visitor centres and public inquiries – at a cost to taxpayers of £25m – English Heritage is now back to square one.

The collapse of the road scheme has in fact been widely welcomed. In supporting it, EH clashed with bodies that ought to be its allies: the National Trust, Friends of the Earth, the Council for British Archaeology, the Campaign to Protect Rural England and ICOMOS-UK (the International Council on Monuments and Sites), as well as Transport 2000, the Pagan Federation and local and national groups formed to protect Stonehenge.

The reason for this is that putting the busy A303, which runs close to the stones, in a tunnel would have been hugely destructive. Only 1.3 miles – less than 20 percent – of a widened four-lane dual-carriageway would have been underground, while the tunnel portals, lit day and night, would have blighted the landscape.

How best to protect and make this extraordinary, haunting and mysterious prehistoric monument accessible has long been controversial – particularly since it was taken into state ownership in 1918. In 1978 the Department of the Environment began to restrict visitors by fencing off the stones. Today, the car park is next to the A344, a second road which runs by the stones, while the tawdry visitors centre which tunnels underneath was created in 1968.

In 1993 the Commons public accounts committee described the presentation of Stonehenge as a "national disgrace". What was also a disgrace, and an assault on democracy, were the brutal methods used by the police and government to prevent New Age travellers, anarchists, Druids, revellers and such like convening at the site for summer solstices throughout the 1980s.

English Heritage, set up in 1984 as a successor to the DoE, tried to do something to improve Stonehenge. The challenge was to move both visitor facilities and traffic away from the stones so they could stand again in a wild, open landscape. The main problem was and is the A303. A proposal to shift it to the north through Larkhill was opposed by the Ministry of Defence, which still occupies great swathes of Salisbury Plain, though this surely could have been overcome by government. (In fact the military did far more damage to Stonehenge last century than the excluded New Age types). By 1994 both EH and the National Trust (which bought the land around Stonehenge by public subscription in the 1920s) agreed that the only solution was to put the road in a long bored tunnel at a cost of around £300m.

In 1997, however, the new Blair government said this was "unaffordable and uneconomic". (How do you put a price on the value of Stonehenge? Absurdly, a report commissioned by EH in 1998 decided it had a £300m "heritage value".) Twin tunnels constructed by "cut and cover" were proposed instead. The damage this cheaper method would inflict on the buried archaeology of this precious landscape, so rich in ancient earthworks, led to its abandonment in 2002 in favour of a cut-price short-bored tunnel.

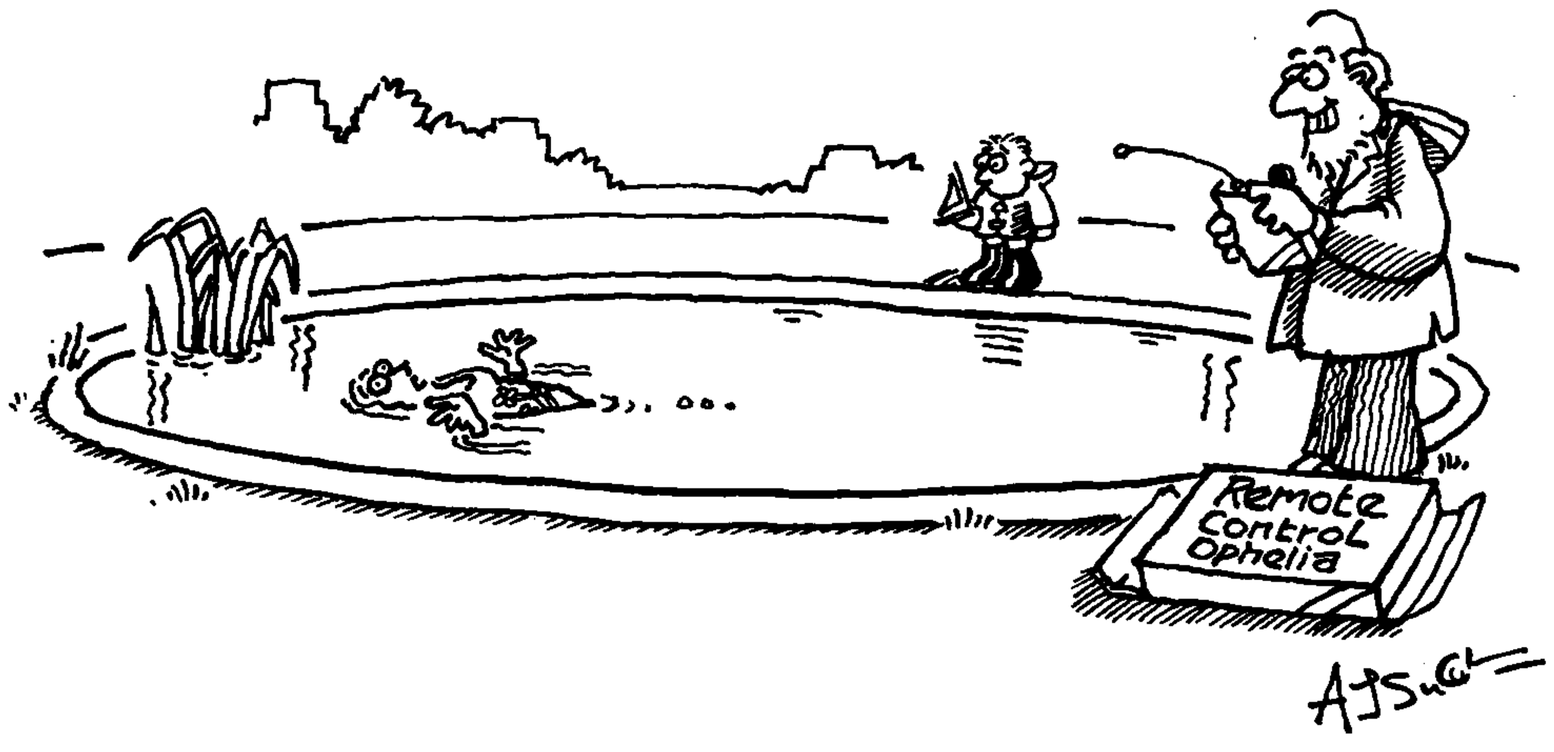
By now, however, the National Trust had changed its mind and withdrawn support. EH, however, remained committed as approval of its proposed new visitor centre, way to the east, depended on it. From there, visitors could walk to the stones, by now unencumbered by roads and buildings, although a ridiculous, obtrusive "land train" was planned for the disabled.

It would be nice to think the Stonehenge Improvement road has been cancelled as it is a bad idea, but it is clear that the government cares only about its cost. No alternative plan is on the table, though opponents of the road now advocate modest improvements: closing and grassing over the A344 and removing the pedestrian tunnel. The problem of the A303, with its continuous roar of traffic, remains. Yet this is a government prepared to spend billions (current estimate £9bn and rising) on the ephemeral London Olympics just as Blair's government could spend £800m on the equally ephemeral Millennium Dome.

It was not always thus. Wayland Young, Lord Kennet, is a leading opponent of the Stonehenge scheme ("barbaric... No other country in the world would contemplate treating a site which is a world icon in such a way") and is living proof that once Labour governments contained educated, civilised people: he was minister of heritage and planning under Harold Wilson in the 1960s and was instrumental in saving St Pancras (*Eye* 1200).

True, Stonehenge has stood for some 5,000 years and will no doubt still be standing when Blair, Brown and their Philistine governments are long forgotten. But our treatment of this wonder remains a national disgrace.

'Piloti'



Letters

Private Eye

The voice of Mohamed

Sir,

I enjoy your malice but am saddened by your ignorance. You ask if I will sue for a "vicious slur" on my reputation in a statement on behalf of Sarah, Duchess of York read to the inquests into the deaths of Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Al Fayed (In The Courts, 21st December 2007).

No, of course not. Everything said or read in court is "privileged" and immune to the laws of defamation. You, above all, ought to know that.

Your more perceptive readers will have spotted that the Duchess's statement did not say she hadn't discussed with Princess Diana the damage the two of them had done to the House of Windsor, as I have written. Her statement said she had "no recollection" of doing so. That is a very different thing. President Reagan could not recall anything at all about the Irangate scandal.

And if the Duchess did not write to the Queen after the Princess was killed, asking to be readmitted to the protection of the Royal family, perhaps she telephoned?

Establishing that fact is yet another reason why the Coroner must approach the Queen to ask her what she remembers of events ten years ago. Justice is administered in Her Majesty's name and in this case, she's in a position to help it along.

Your ignorant errors could have been avoided if your writer had been in court. He would then have been aware that the Duchess's statement did not call me "a liar". That libellous assertion is not protected by "privilege".

I am so glad that you mentioned my "pompadoured" and "bouffant" hair. It's the surest sign that any critic has lost the point as well as the argument.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL COLE,

Spokesman for Mohamed Al Fayed, The Chairman, Harrods Limited.

Lookalike

Princess

Princess

Sir,

I could not help noticing an uncanny similarity between the bit-part actor Princess Beatrice (for it is she) and Princess Fiona of Shrek 1, 2 and 3 fame.

Is there a sinister side to the Windsor dynasty? I feel we should be told.

Yours faithfully,
STUART McCUBBIN,

South Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Dumb Britain

Sir,

Re Private Eye, Xmas Issue.

Printer: If last week's issue was 1199, what should the number be for this week's? I'll give you a clue, it's 1199 plus 1.

Eye copy editor: Er... 1120?

Yours,
STEPHEN HAND,

Via email.

● *Thanks for all the other similar letters. Last issue should have been number 1200. Ed.*

It's a Calum-ny

Sir,

It would seem that Calum Stewart (Open and Shut Case, Eye Letters, 1120), thinks it perfectly fine that huge donations from millionaire businessmen influence SNP policy as long as the donations are "open and transparent". This blatant hypocrisy seems endemic to Scottish nationalism.

The Nationalist MP who mischievously started the "Holier than Thou" Cash for Honours enquiry and lectured others on probity was hardly a paragon of moral virtue himself, having confessed to plying alcohol on an under-age teenage girl in an attempt to get her and her friend into his hotel room.

And for years the SNP campaigned for, ironically, a British knighthood for Sean Connery, one of the top contributors to the party's funds.

When it comes to sleaze, the SNP are a match for anyone.

Yours,
ALEXANDER MCKAY,
Edinburgh.

Killing joke

Sir,

Your inclusion of the cartoon of the suicide bomber (Eye 1120, p20) demonstrates once again that, despite your publication progressing from a squalid little rag to a fine organ of investigation, the adolescent sixth form snigger-snigger mentality that marked your very first publication persists. You know it doesn't please; you do it just to tease. Please desist.

Yours,
LEN PEDROZA,
University of Brighton.

Farr sighted

Sir,

Nick Thompson ("Railing at Dr B. Ching", Letters, 1120) misses the point of the high-speed London to North of England/Scotland high-speed line that Dr B. Ching so rightly advocates. With people increasingly aware of the environmental damage of flying, and with security delays at airports, rail is becoming an acceptable alternative for journeys of three-four hours.

Thus the East Coast main line (London-Edinburgh average journey time 4½ hours) already has a significant proportion of the rail-air market. But a purpose-built 200mph route would not only cut journey time to under three hours and further erode domestic air travel; it would free much-needed capacity on existing tracks for conventional trains.

Yours faithfully,
KEITH FARR,
Cholsey, Oxon.

The estate we're in

Sir,

Re: "A conviction lacking in fibre" (In The Back, 1120). "... as part of a trawl of the owners of Ford Montego estate cars..."

This is a stupid mistake. Who on earth doesn't know that Ford build a car called the Mondeo while the Montego was made by Austin-Rover? It's not some obscure piece of Greek or Roman mythology, there are hundreds of thousands of examples of both on the streets of the nation for you to inspect if you so desire.

Yours etc,
TIM COULSON,
Via email.

● *Apologies: it should indeed have been an Austin Montego. Ed.*

Life imitating art

Sir,

'Gavel Basher' (Eye 1120) reports the finance director of the Ministry of Defence admitting that he has no financial qualifications. In an episode of "Yes, Prime Minister", a long concealed blunder is revealed for which Sir Humphrey is responsible. "Well, how was I to know?" he expostulates. "I wasn't an economist! If I had been, I wouldn't have been in charge of the economics unit, would I?" It is one of the great traditions of British government that those in charge of something should not know anything about it. It would only confuse them.

Practically every ludicrous situation of that brilliant series, which ended in 1988, has been brought to life in the last ten years.

DR JOHN RADFORD,
London E1.

Benevolent Bennie

Sir,

Grateful though I am for an unusually complimentary reference in your organ (HP Sauce, 1120), I must correct the misleading impression it conveys of Bennie Abrahams, father of the alas-more-famous David. Abrahams Senior was a warm-hearted, active and popular councillor, first as a Progressive and then as Labour, who was not close to T. Dan Smith nor influential in Newcastle's Labour Group; nor, so far as I know, was he a property developer.

Yours,
JEREMY BEECHAM,
Newcastle on Tyne.

Moronic letter

Sir,

I think it is disgraceful the way that you published the Royal Variety Show caption picture featuring HM The Queen and Piers Morgan (Eye 1120). It was far too small and many people may have missed it!

NICK AXTEN,
Cranleigh, Surrey.

Frank you

Sir,

In the interests of accuracy and historical record I would like to correct your attribution of the design of the Ealing Broadway Shopping Centre to Frank Roberts.

The facts are that I was the Partner in BDP that won the competition for the whole centre. Frank did not join the design team until the layout was well established. It is true to say that his input to the office component of the scheme was most important, and the design of the housing in Carillon Court was entirely his.

Yours sincerely,
N. KEITH SCOTT, CBE,
Keith Scott Consultancy, Preston.

Scenes You Seldom See

"I'm not surprised – he's always behaved a bit strangely"

RADAR blip

Sir,

As one of the UK's leading pan-disability organisations, RADAR would normally be among the first to applaud your criticism of the Government for decisions which adversely affect disabled people. However, to describe Ann McGuire and Peter Hain as "New Labour Scrooges" (Eye 1120) over Remploy factory closures is unfair and misses the bigger picture.

The proposals made by Remploy to close or merge factories, which Peter Hain accepted, have been broadly welcomed by RADAR and most other disability organisations. There will be no compulsory redundancies amongst disabled workers, fewer factories than originally proposed will close and Remploy will receive more public contracts in future.

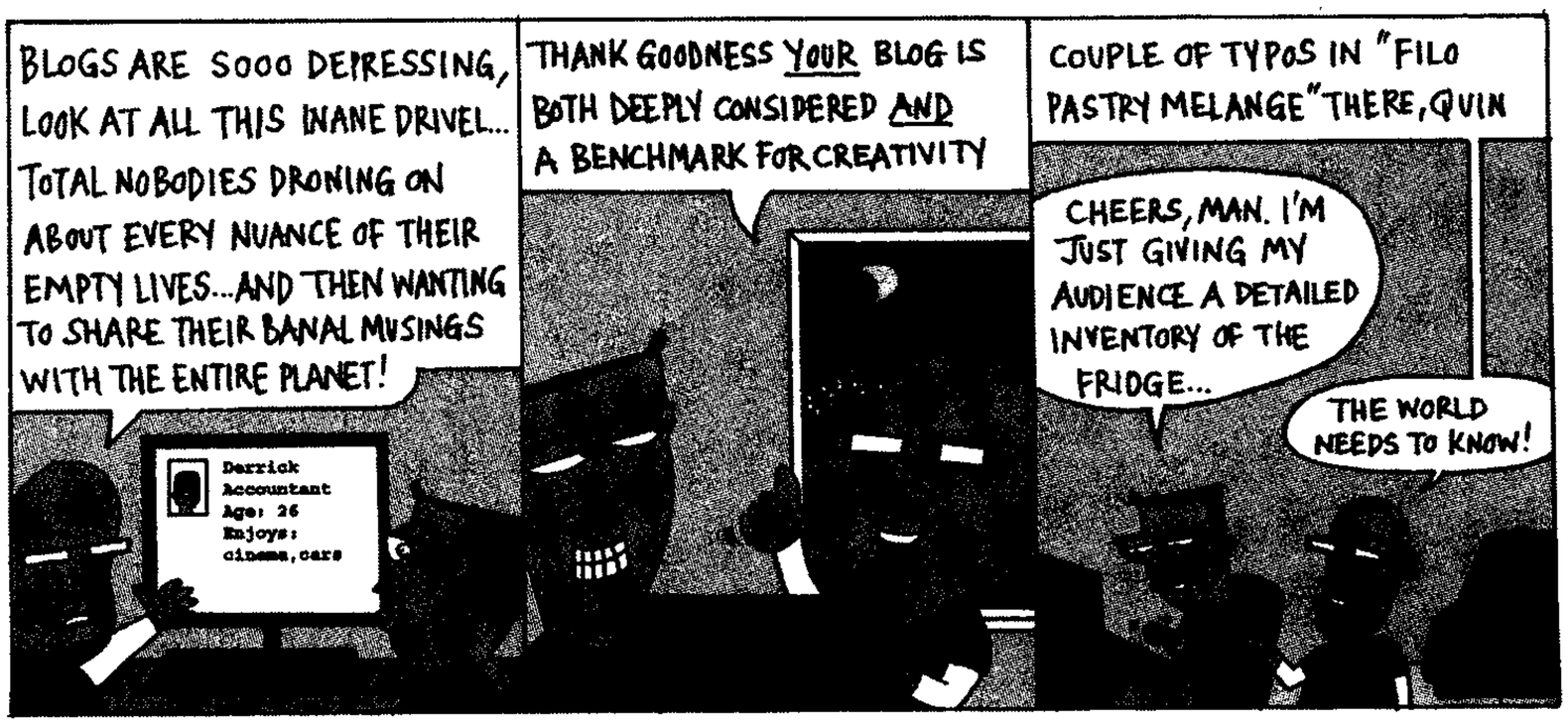
Alongside sheltered factories, Remploy supports disabled people in finding and maintaining positions with mainstream employers. Previously one third of Government spending on disability and employment supported seven thousand Remploy employees, while according to the Office for National Statistics there are around seven million disabled people of working age in Britain.

33 percent of the money being spent on 0.1 percent of the target group is hardly a sensible or sustainable arrangement. Remploy's employment services, however, find jobs with mainstream employers for five thousand disabled people per year *and the new proposals aim to quadruple this number.*

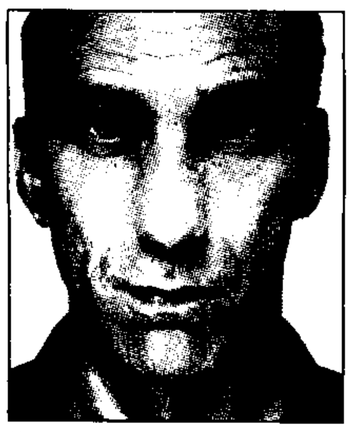
It was our opinion, and that of the Government, and that of the Opposition, and that of other disability organisations, that expanding Remploy's employment services was a better use of resources than maintaining economically unsustainable factories.

Yours sincerely,
LIZ SAYCE,
Chief Executive, Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR).

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON — KNIFE & PACKER


BLOGS ARE SOOO DEPRESSING, LOOK AT ALL THIS INANE DRIVEL... TOTAL NOBODIES DRONING ON ABOUT EVERY NUANCE OF THEIR EMPTY LIVES...AND THEN WANTING TO SHARE THEIR BANAL MUSINGS WITH THE ENTIRE PLANET!
Derrick
Accountant
Age: 26
Enjoys:
cinema, cars
THANK GOODNESS YOUR BLOG IS BOTH DEEPLY CONSIDERED AND A BENCHMARK FOR CREATIVITY
COUPLE OF TYPOS IN "FILO PASTRY MELANGE" THERE, QUIN
CHEERS, MAN. I'M JUST GIVING MY AUDIENCE A DETAILED INVENTORY OF THE FRIDGE...
THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW!

Lookalike



Ego

Self

Sir,

The gloomy and terrifying restaurant critic from Ratatouille – Anton Ego (aka The Grim Eater) – and the cadaverous writer Will Self are surely related?

Self? Ego? I rest my case.

RODDY MURRAY,

Isle of Lewis.

Figurative skating

Sir,

As an early champion and one-time practitioner of figurative public sculpture, I agree absolutely with Piloti that the tide of banal and fundamentally unsculptural bronze mementoes which are cluttering up our public places are, after all, worse than the proliferation of welded steel objects which were their immediate predecessors. Abstract art has at least one small advantage over figurative art, in that it is impossible for the viewer to perceive whether it is rotten or not.

Badly conceived and executed figurative sculpture, on the other hand, gives itself away immediately, like a clumsily played musical instrument.

It's obvious that (with a few honourable exceptions such as James Butler and Sandy Stoddart), most practitioners have no concept of what the sculpture of a human figure entails, and that the clients who commission these works have no aesthetic judgement at all.

Yours,

GERALD LAING,

Kinkell Castle, Dingwall, Scotland.

Sir,

I counted myself a friend of Ian Walters, a committed socialist and diligent researcher of subjects he admired for their left politics aimed at improving and uplifting society. He sought to represent their spirit in his sculptures as well as making them concrete and recognisable for future generations and was keen that they should be accessible and placed prominently in appropriate settings. Unfair, I think, that his work should be likened to "waxworks in bronze" (Piloti, Eye 1120).

Yours,

PAUL COPLEY,

London SW14.

Sir,

Piloti need not worry about Sir John Betjeman's statue being overshadowed (Eye 1120). Judging by the crowds of young people I saw clustered about him having their photographs taken, the grand old fellow will become one of the most popular attractions of the station. By contrast, Paul Day's unhappy couple lurked far off in gloomy isolation. Photography with them in view would need a telephoto lens or a leaning toward foot fetishism. Thus does authenticity triumph over pretension.

Sincerely,

BRUCE ABRAHAMS,

London SW15.

Cross words

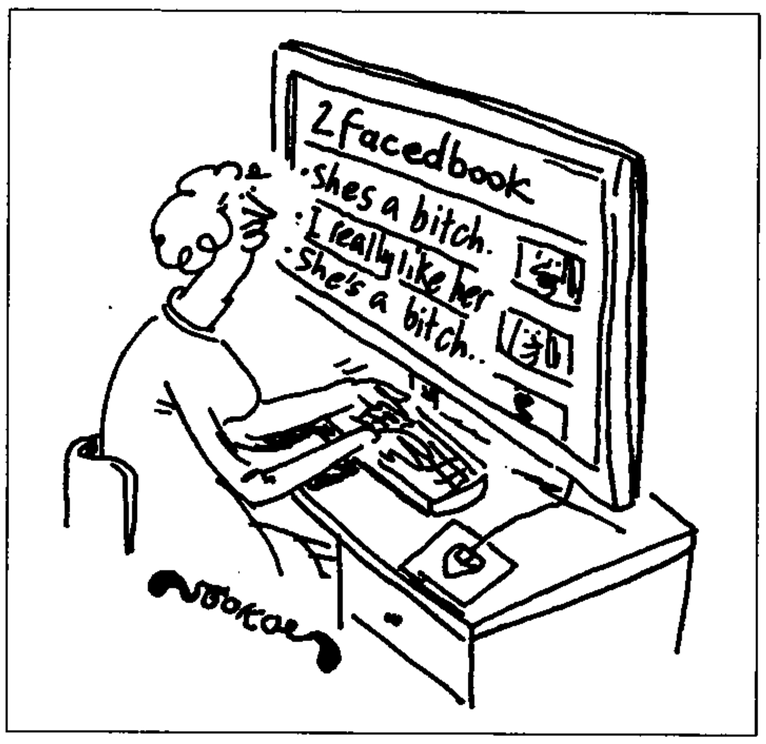
Sir,

I am writing to complain about the cover of your Christmas issue (1120). As a Christian I was in no way offended by the cover picture – please try harder next time.

Yours, wishing I had a subscription so I could cancel it...

SCOTT HARVIE,

Via email.



Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I've gone from being a global champion to being a world-wide champion."

RICKY HATTON, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Scott)

"It's not easy, that's why it's difficult..."

ANDY GRAY, Sky Sports 1
(Dave Conlin)

"There hasn't been a lot of quality but it's been a high-quality game."

STEVE CLARIDGE, Radio 5 Live
(Matt Moore)

"Relieved... anxious... flushed... all the superlatives come out."

STEVE BRUCE, Radio 5 Live
(Terry Saunders)

"Fights can be won or lost on the day of the fight."

DAVID HAYE, Sky Box Office
(Chris Turner)

Pedants Corner

... Your Daily Victorygraph, dated December 1805, (Eye 1120) castigates one Admiral Horatio Nelson for involvement in a "Legover Storm". In fact the noble lord was doing rather well to get his leg over anything by the date in question, as he had been sealed in a barrel of brandy since October 22nd. Nor was Lord Nelson a full admiral, but Vice (can't believe you missed the potential of that one) Admiral of the White at the time of his death, this placing him more or less exactly halfway up the flag list. Lord Nelson never wore an eye patch, hence its complete absence in Lemuel Francis Abbott's famous portrait. Nelson had a green shade added to his uniform hat, but above his good eye, to protect it.

I still thought it was funny though, so please accept this only as a somewhat sesquepedal [sic] attempt at gatecrashing the apostrophe-free exclusivity which is Pedants Corner.

COLIN MACDONALD.

... It may be hilarious that there might not be room on a plumbers' windscreen for two Polish first names but Roger Latham's observation (Eye 1199) is spoiled by the facts that Krzystof is shorter than its English equivalent Christopher and that Wienczyslaw is a surname. Mike Barfield is meanwhile having problems with his spelling: the fifth letter in the Polish Xmas greeting "Wesolych Swiat" is a crossed L and not a T.

JOHN PRESLAND.

.. Loath as I am to bail out the likes of Matthew D'Ancona, his slew of unlikely comparisons (Olivier as Richard III, Ken Dodd etc) to the stage persona of Johnny Rotten/John Lydon of the Sex Pistols (Pseuds Corner, Eye 1120) is actually a direct (and, I notice, uncredited) borrowing of Lydon's own retrospective comments about said stage act in Julien Temple's year 2000 documentary about the band, "The Filth And The Fury".

PETER MILLS.

... It is a great pleasure to point out a mistake one has been mocked for making oneself even if only by subs on a lesser organ.

Remote Controller is of course entitled to rubbish the BBC adaptation of "Ballet Shoes" but he or she should have realised that the book's author apparently came from a long line of dyslexics and was [Noel] Streatfeild, not Streatfield.

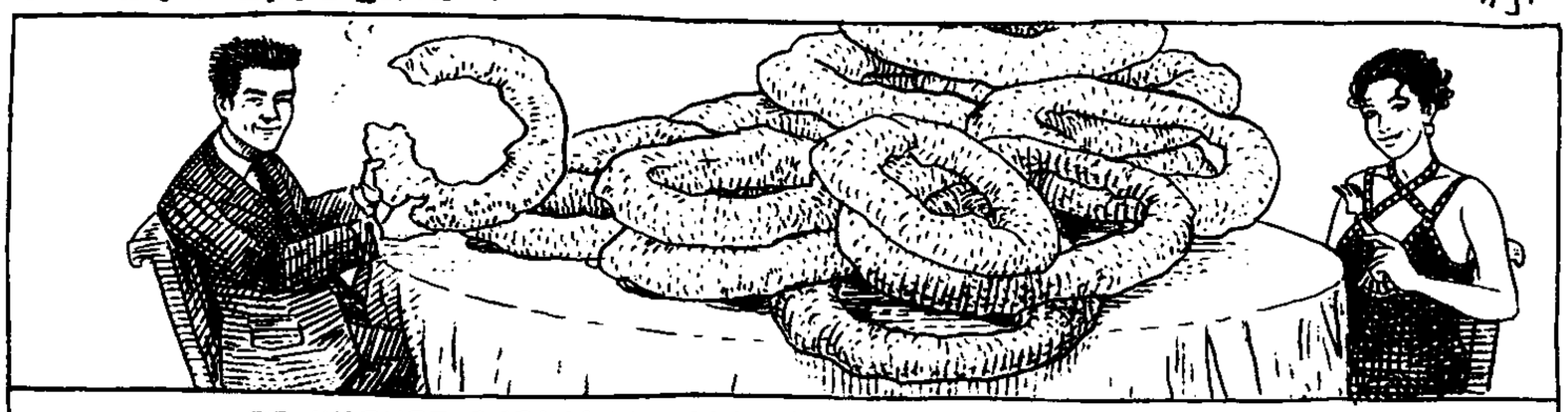
DAVID SELF.

... Mr Cutler (Letters, 1120) asserts that "Pedants' Corner" would be incorrect, since "Pedants" is not a possessive form but is adjectival; he further observes that Lord Gnome would be required to order the renaming of "Pseuds Corner" as "Pseuds' Corner" were the alternative to be correct. In a sense all possessive forms are "adjectival", in that they describe, or add information to, a noun, in a manner similar to the way adjectives function; but this is not to accept his argument, which is based on false premises. In English, adjectives do not agree in number or gender (unlike, say, in French) so if "Pedants" was indeed an adjectival form it would, of necessity, be used thus: "Pedant Corner" – English adjectives being singular – but no one would say "Pedant Corner", since that might imply that there is only one pedant, when we all know that the readership of the Eye consists substantially of pedants.

"Pedants" is, of course, a possessive, so we could equally speak of "The Corner of the Pedants" (the English version of the genitive case). In short, the correct usage should be "Pedants' Corner", which means that Mr Cutler has drawn one correct conclusion at least: "Pseuds Corner" should forthwith be renamed "Pseuds' Corner".

GLYN AUSTEN.

GLOBAL WARMING THE PLUS SIDE



25. WARMER OCEANS INCREASE SIZE AND QUANTITY OF CALAMARI.

Letter from **Delhi**
from Our Own Correspondent

HOW reassuring to see our leaders continuing some of South Asia's most dearly beloved democratic traditions: feudal nepotism.

Following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the torch of freedom, as was her wish and command, has passed to her 19-year-old son Bilawal. Within hours of his mother's death he had added his mother's maiden name to his surname, becoming Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari. There can be no finer qualification for heading the Pakistan People's Party than by emphasizing the bloodline to his grandfather Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who founded the party in 1967.

Few will be surprised if the heir-in-waiting eventually drops his father's Zardari family name altogether to squeeze full symbolic value from the Bhutto moniker. After all, his mother – even in Pakistan's otherwise apparently strict Islamic society – kept her own family name when she married Asif Ali Zardari in 1987. Her autobiography was originally published in 1989 as the modestly geographic Daughter of the East; but a few months later the title was changed to Daughter of Destiny, a more suitable allusion to the dynastic lineage that entitled her to power.

It would be churlish in these tragic times to dwell on any irony with the PPP's original goals: to build democracy and promote economic and social justice – and specifically to eliminate the canker of feudalism, which four decades later still dominates Pakistan's politics, society and military. But this is a region riddled with division and mutual suspicion.

However, here in India there will be no quiet scoffing at our neighbour's curiously proprietorial politics. For across so much of the subcontinent there is one shared and immutable principle: family names have high political currency. The Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has ruled our country for most of its 60 years since independence. Our ever more modern economy may be booming but other parochial habits die hard: Rahul Gandhi, the 37-year-old scion of India's first political family, is being groomed as heir to the family patrimony.

In the first step towards readying her politically inexperienced son for "higher and heavier responsibilities" – a euphemism for the premiership – mother Sonia engineered his appointment as general-secretary of the ruling Congress party. Italian-born she may be, but the 60-year-old widow owes her status as one of the world's most powerful women and de facto ruler of our nation of one billion to the name she took when she married into our first family. Her late husband Rajiv took over as prime minister from his mother Indira in 1985, who in turn had succeeded her father Jawaharal Nehru– a contemporary of Benazir's grandfather, Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto – to the job. His father Motilal established the dynasty a century ago when he emerged as a key Congress leader.

This feudalism is not confined to the region's two nuclear powers. In Bangladesh one political dynasty is headed by Hasina Wajed, daughter of the country's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman; the other by Khaleda Zia, widow of President General Ziaur Rahman. In party politics in Sri Lanka the Senanayakes have most often been on the backfoot to the Bandaranaikes. When S.W.R.D. Bandanaranaike was assassinated in 1959, his widow Sirimavo became the world's first woman premier. Her daughter was elected president in 1994 and appointed her mother as prime minister once more.

Even the delicate Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's incarcerated opposition leader, is the daughter of General Aung San who founded his country's military in 1942 and was instrumental in bringing about Burmese independence.

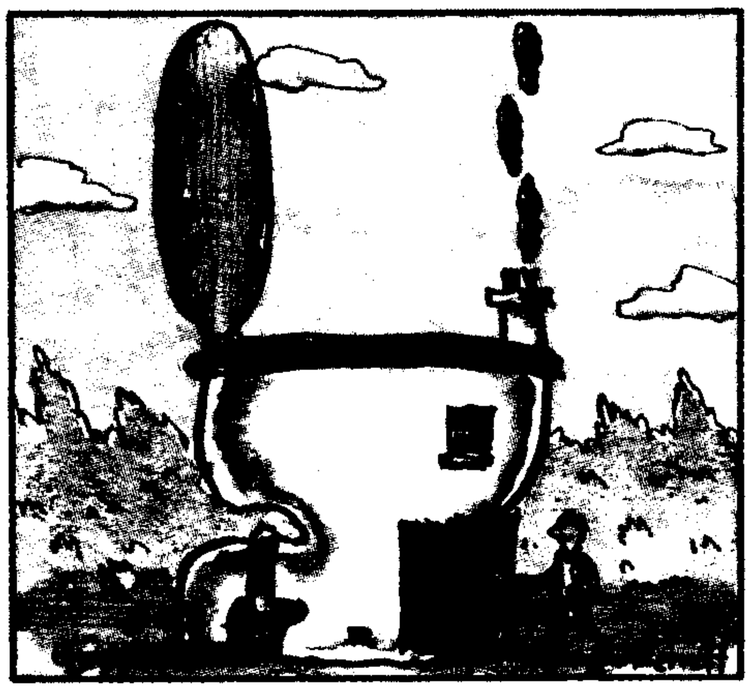
Strangely spoiling the tryst are the region's two once absolute monarchies. In Bhutan on new year's day, voters went to the polls for the first time to elect a national assembly. And in Nepal parliament has voted to abolish the crown altogether. What sacrilege!

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I am proud to be known throughout South Korea as 'Mr Toilet'," Sim Jae-duck told reporters gathered outside his house in Suwom, "because toilets stand central to people's lives. I have devoted my career to modernising public restrooms, and believe that the toilet revolution provides hope and happiness for all mankind. And as you can see, my new house is a physical expression of my beliefs, because 'Haewoojae' is the world's first domicile ever to be built and shaped like a gigantic toilet.

"The name 'Haewoojae' means 'a place to solve one's worries', and that is the theme of



this new 4,520-square-foot house. To build it, I tore down my old home, and replaced it with this twenty-five-foot-high toilet bowl, in which I now live. You can gain access to the roof balcony around the rim of the bowl by climbing these stairs, through what would usually be the toilet drain. And inside, the showpiece of the house is a gigantic bathroom, on display through a floor-to-ceiling glass window, which turns opaque at the touch of a button. What better way to push forward the cause of better sanitation than by this ultimate public expression of my philosophy?" *(St Louis Post Dispatch, 11/11/07. Spotter: Hugh Macdonald)*

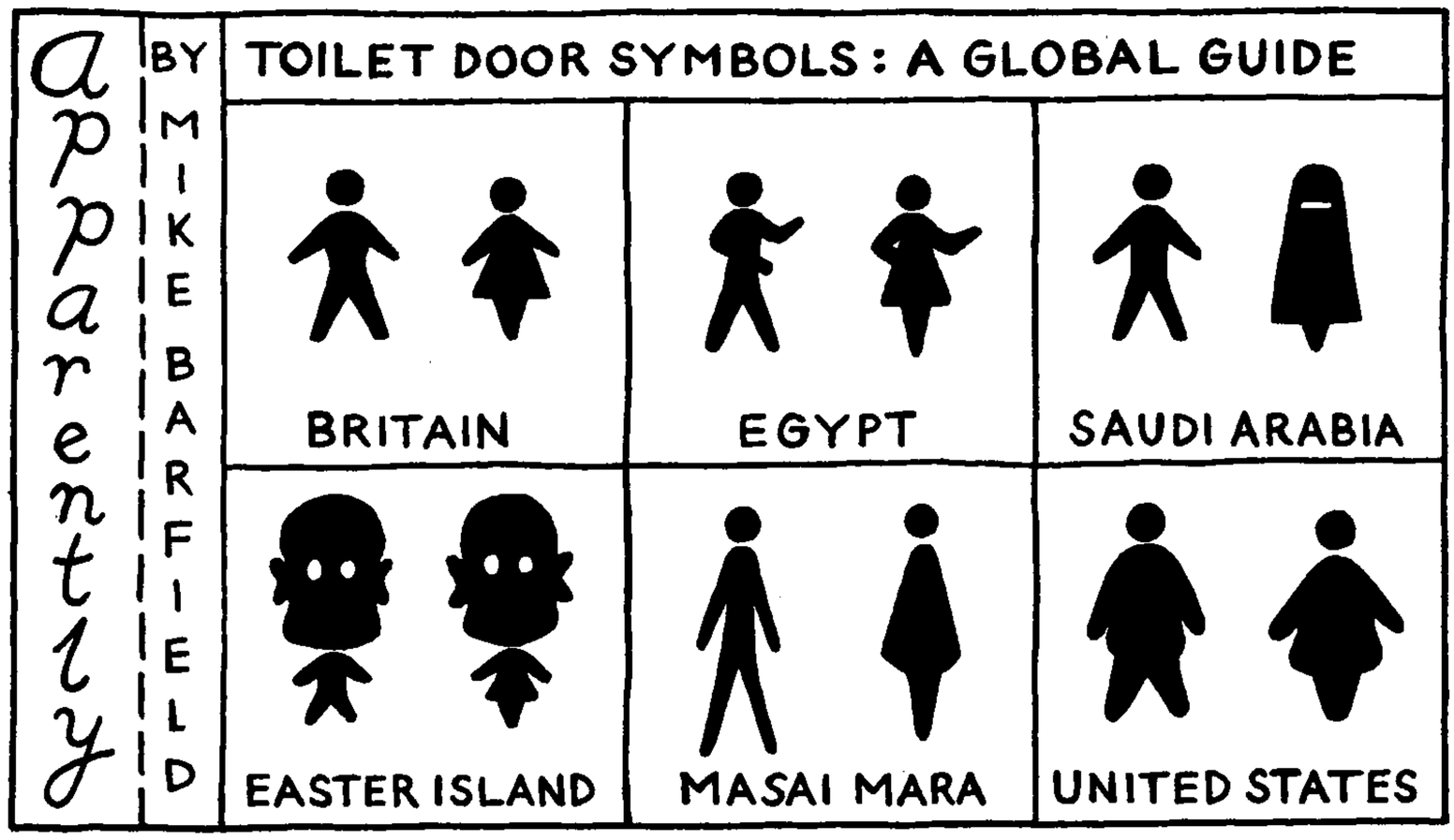
● *"When I first noticed that my sweat was turning green," Cheng Shunghuo told doctors in Wuhan City First Hospital, "I tried to pretend it was just my imagination. But soon I couldn't deny it, because my underwear had started to turn bright green, and so had my bed sheets, and even the water in the shower was green by the time it went down the plughole. I felt no discomfort, but became worried that it might be something really serious, so I've come to hospital to find out what it is. But so far, nobody here seems to know what the matter is either. Everyone seems to be baffled."*

Doctors admitted that "we can't find the cause. We have carried out blood and urine tests on Cheng, and checked his diet, and found everything to be normal. But after thoroughly cleansing his armpits, it took only ten minutes for his sweat to turn a piece of white gauze bright green again. We have never come across such a condition before, and are completely baffled. That's why we are reporting the case to the media, in the hope that somebody out there knows what the problem is, and can suggest a solution." (Daily Times [Pakistan], 6/12/07. Spotter: Anon)

– ● –

● "I'd saved a lot of frequent flier miles," Mandy Bailey told reporters in Phoenix, Arizona, "and decided to use them to visit relatives in Baltimore, so they could see my twin baby daughters. I had enough points to book a seat for my sister-in-law, Shar Lybbert, as well as one for me, and because Delta Air Lines allows one child under the age of two to fly free with an adult, we didn't expect to have to pay anything. So I was shocked when the airline said that, because my daughters are conjoined at the chest, I'd have to pay for a separate seat for them, even though I wanted them both to sit on my lap."

Explaining the airline's decision, a Delta spokesman commented "this is a unique situation that we're working with the customer to resolve. The problem is with the regulations. An airline must provide enough oxygen for every passenger on a flight travelling higher than 15,000 feet, so there must be access to an oxygen mask for everyone. These conjoined twins each have their own lungs, so regulations require them to have their own seat, in case of an emergency. Under the circumstances, we have decided not to charge these customers for their outward flight, but the return journey is still a problem, because the adults are returning on separate flights. As I said, it's a very unique situation." *(Arizona Star, 10/5/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



A SPECIAL NEW YEAR DIRECTIVE (NO. 12)

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

Let us be in no doubt that dark clouds are now rolling up on every side. The waves are rising and a storm of unprecedented magnitude threatens the ship of state.

Never before has it been so vital that the destiny of the British nation should be in the hands of a man with years of experience, who has many times before navigated that ship through the storm. Such a man could be called "the Great Helmsman", though modesty prevents me from using this title and I am happy with the more humble "Supreme Leader".

Can we imagine, Comrades, at such an hour, that our fate should be entrusted not to the Great Helmsman, but instead to some callow youth, scarcely out of short trousers, who is so effete and inexperienced that he can scarcely hold the tiller? I am thinking of that jumped-up, sneering schoolboy Cameron, who has the effrontery to court popularity each week by attempting to poke fun at me in the meetings of the Westminster Soviet.

He may well earn the sniggering approbation of the Etonian Boris-ite Osbornist claque with which he surrounds himself. But let him try his hand in a Force Nine gale, like an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease or the collapse of Northern Rock or the loss of the entire country's personal data in the post.

Then let's see how popular he would be! It would no longer be a matter of "Cameron ahead in the polls", so much as "Cameron's head on a pole".

This, by the way, is a light-hearted, off-the-cuff aside prepared for me by my new Commissariat for Jocularity. It received a standing ovation from Comrades Balls, Blears and Kelly when I first delivered it at a meeting of the Politburo in Downing Street.

Comrade Miliband then wisely volunteered to join the ovation shortly after it was pointed out to him what severe penalties might follow if he failed to give due recognition to the new-found and nationally important sense of humour displayed by the Leader. (For those of you who require its reference number, it is No. 1,417 in the Supreme Leader's Compendium of Impromptu Humour!)

But this is no time for levity. We have put behind us for ever the sickening display of adolescent, facetious one-linerism which was such a hallmark of the regime of the discredited former leader, with his constant toadying to the demands of the trivia-obsessed Murdochite-Rothermereist media circus.

No. There is trouble ahead. And I must warn you that energy will be very expensive in the Age of Change. Oil, gas and electricity are all expected to rise to record levels thanks to our British power companies which are now unfortunately owned by greedy foreign capitalists. However, Comrades, there is good news. Thanks to global warming, we will all need to use less energy to heat our homes and those houses under water will not need any heating whatsoever. So there is no chance of this subversive Energy Inflationism undermining my prudent achievements in running the British economy.

May I end by reminding you all once again of what has already been achieved since I assumed the office of your Supreme, democratically-elected Leader only six short months ago.

1. Thanks to my careful yet generous management of the nation's finances, we have at last established a stable, sound, thriving economy, where people are free to borrow as much money as they want, and are free to spend it on alcohol, twenty-four hours a day.

In what other country in the world would this be possible?

2. There are too many other achievements to mention here.

I wish all the British people, regardless of gender, creed, ethnic origin, sexual orientation or political affiliation, a hard-working, vigilant and constructive New Year!

Gordon Brown

HEROES OF THE BRITISH UNION

Unlike the discredited regime of the lightweight former leader Blair, national honours will not now be given for trivial showbizite-celebritism, but for solid, heroic achievement by workers building a better Britain. Therefore, Comrade Parkinson is given the Order of Gordon (2nd Class) and Comrade Kylie is given the Glorious Order of the Patriotic Bottom (1st Class). Also, to distance the Supreme Leader from the hated Blairite practise of rewarding sycophantic political acolytes, the following awards are made: Comrade Tom Kelly, Medal for the Defence of the Party (against the Walter Mittyite fantasist Dr David Kelly); Comrade Chief Vet Debbie Reynolds, Order of the Red Face, for her part in spreading the Foot-and-Mouth virus.

BY ORDER OF THE SUPREME LEADER

The following measures will be implemented this week:

- The NHS will be given a constitution
- The EU will not be given a constitution – it will be given a treaty
- To highlight the difference between this government and the militaristic Fascist regimes of previous eras, trains in Britain will not run on time or indeed, in many cases, at all.

Such is the Age of Change at Reading for Didcot Parkway.

Election Results In Full

Kenya

Kenyatta South-East
Dead 611
Injured 6,322
Displaced 250,137

President Kibaki re-elected with 110 per cent of the vote.
(No change)

Pakistan

Karachi West
Dead 51
Injured 5,748
Arrested 100,203

President Musharraf re-elected without anyone having to bother to vote. *(No change)*

How Democracy Works

Pt. 94
The Indo-Pakistani model

1. Inherit leadership of pro-democracy party from dead father/mother.
2. Be assassinated.
3. Pass on leadership of pro-democracy party to son/daughter.
4. Repeat process ad nauseam.

Pt. 95
The US model

1. Become president.
2. Pass on job to idiot son/ ghastly wife etc.

(That's enough democracy, Ed.)

EU-phemisms

Kenya's still pretending to care what the electorate think...

TRAIN SEEN LEAVING STATION

by Our Travel Correspondent **Phil Platform**

FORGET Elvis in the supermarket! Forget the little green men from Venus! Forget Our Lord's face in a pizza! Today I saw with my own eyes a train leaving a station.

It was unbelievable – and, even more amazingly, it was full of passengers reading *Metro*, including Lord Lucan, the Abominable Snowman and Shergar.

But a spokesman for Network Rail poured cold water on the alleged sighting.

"I think someone has had one too many over the festive period. We have a lot of these so-called 'sightings' at this time of the year, but I'm afraid they can all be put down to excess alcohol intake over the holiday."

On Other Pages

BBC Star *NOT* In Cocaine Death Mystery **94.**

That New Dworkin Supersize Friday Primary Caucus In Full

Republican Candidates

Pipe Suckerbee, 45, charismatic Baptist preacher whose surprise win in the Oklabama caucus stunned commentators and put him on the road to the White House.

Mutt Jeffrey, 73, charismatic Mormon corned beef magnate from Longhorn, Utah, whose extreme views on gay marriage, abortion and corned beef make him a strong favourite with America's North-East-Mid-South "McDonald's Belt".

Senator John McWayne, 83, former Green Beret turned politician whose liberal stance on gay marriage, Iraq and corned beef have touched a nerve with America's so-called Democratic Republicans, i.e. women, blacks, the over-75s and the Hispanic corned beef pro-taco community.

Rudolfo Reindeeri, 67, charismatic former mayor of Santa Grotto, Reindeeri could be a high flyer if his airborne "election sleigh" finally gets off the ground. Reindeeri's zero tolerance of people who "haven't been good" may alienate some in the Naughty Heartlands of the Deep Mid South but he remains the one to believe in.

Tom Cruise, 47, charismatic dark horse who has so far failed to announce his candidacy. A born-again Scientologist who was conceived by aliens from outer space, Cruise, with his good looks and extreme views on Thetanology could prove difficult to beat if the world goes completely mad.

George W. Bush, 57, uncharismatic former president who has yet to realise he can't run for a third term. Will someone tell him in time? (That's enough Republicans, Ed).

The Benazir I knew

by A.L.L. Hax

IN THE Oxford of the 1970s there was no more familiar or beautiful face than that of the young Benazir Bhutto, or "Booty" as she was known to her intimate group of party-going friends!

Who could resist her warm smile, her dark eyes and her winning combination of girlie confidence and serious political ambition?

Punting on the Isis, waltzing at May Balls, cycling down the high street... it is just a pity I never met her.

© *All newspapers.*

That Boris Johnson Column in Full

CRIPES! I mustn't say anything naughty this week in case Red Ken's lot get hold of it and try and trip me up! So no mention of Fuzzy-Wuzzies or moaning Scousers! Sorry readers!

© *The Daily Telegraph 2008 pounds per word.*

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S RE-TOX QUEEN!!?

■ **OOH-LA-LA! Chapeaux off to French Monsieur Romeo – it's Nicolas Sarkozy I'm talking about, stoopid!?! Sexy Sarko's got the Gallic guts to say *au revoir* to his moaning missus and shack up with top teenage Eyetie totty Carla Bruni!!?! Can you imagine our Gordon ditching Sensible Sarah and running off with cokehead Kate Moss?!? No way José!?!? And aren't we all the poorer for it!?!! So I say trois cheers for Naughty Nicolas!?! Or Knickerless!?! (Geddit?!?)**

■ SARKOZY – what a disgrace!?!! Calls himself the President of France but can't keep his pantalons on for long enough to run the country!?! Booh-la-la to this snail-guzzling sex maniac and his latest underage model from the land of raunchy ravioli and sex-packed spaghetti!?! You're making a fool of yourself, Nicolas, a-rumpin' and a-pumpin' with this second-hand model!?! (Geddit?!) You're not Carla's première and you won't be the dernière!?!! So thank God says *moi* for Ungarlicky Gordon and Sober Sarah – doesn't it make you proud to be British?!?

■ *BRITNEY SPEARS – aren'tchasickof her?!? Why do we have to read about every little thing she does?!? Who cares if she shaves her head!?! Who cares if she goes into the funny farm?!? Who cares if her kids are taken into care?!?? Who cares if she dies horribly!?! We do because then we won't have anything to write about. So shed a tear for sad Britney who deserves our sympathy as she shaves her head, goes into rehab and has her kids taken away from her. God bless you, Britney!?! We love ya!?!*

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Winter Warmers!?!

● **Fabio Capello.** When you've finished with the English team, Fabby, how about licking *me* into shape!?!!

● **Pervez Musharraf.** Pakistan's sexy supremo – you get my vote even if there's no election!?!

● **Jacob Zuma** – the new leader of South Africa's SNC!?! OK, you're accused of money-laundering, racketeering and rape!? Why not Zuma-round to my place, Big Boy, and bring your Zulu spear with you!??!

Byeee!

'WE WON'T TREAT YOU IF YOU'RE ILL' SAYS NHS

by Our Medical Staff **C. Difficile**

ONLY PEOPLE who are 100 per cent fit will in future qualify for treatment under the National Health Service, health chiefs warned yesterday.

"We cannot be expected to treat people who have made no effort to keep themselves well," said the Government's new "fitness czar" Bob Dunkwell, formerly the chief executive of United Biscuits.

"Let's be honest, people who get ill have only got themselves to blame – treatment nowadays is very expensive and we cannot afford to waste it on people who aren't well.

"Those who are absolutely healthy must be given top priority," he concluded.

Jonathan Cainer, Britain's Top Astrophycisist, Gives His Predictions for 2008

1. Maddy will be found

on the front page of every newspaper most days of the year, until she is not found.

Classic movie tops '100 Best-ever' chart yet again

by Our Film Staff PHIL SCHEDULE

THE legendary comedy classic *The Life Of Brian Sewell* was unanimously voted 'The Best Film Ever Made By Anyone In The History Of The World' by a panel of three people in the Channel Four office over Christmas.

The film, which irreverently sends up the life of the revered art critic who is worshipped by millions of readers of the Evening Standard, caused immense controversy when it was first shown in the 1970s.

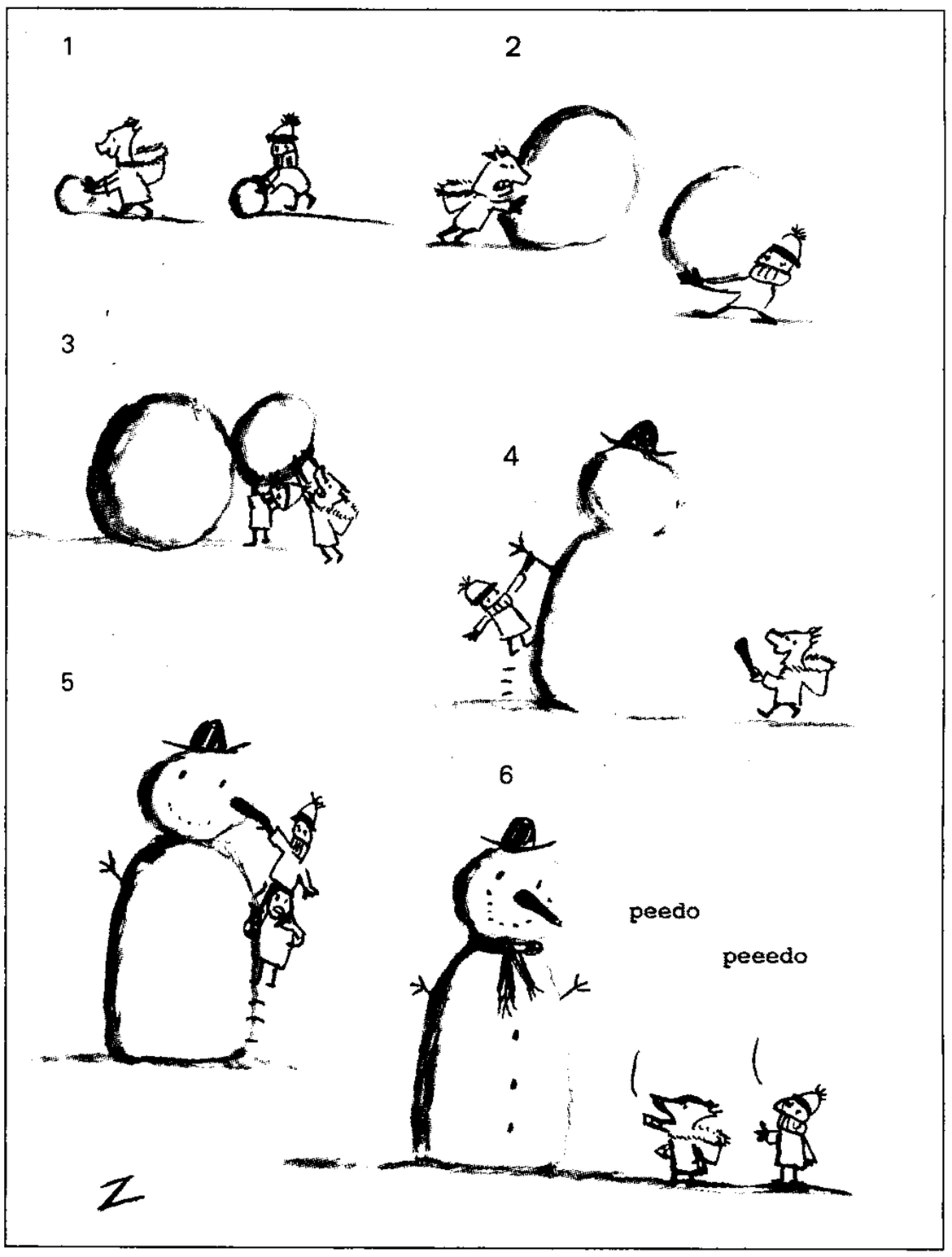
At the time Malcolm Muggeridge and Mary Whitehouse launched a ferocious attack on the movie by describing it as 'the funniest film ever made'.

Said the star of the film, Sir John Cleese, "Everything we ever did was brilliant, but this was the most brilliant of all."

The Life Of Brian Sewell narrowly beat *Citizen Ken*, the legendary Hollywood story of the rise to power of a monstrous megalomaniac, who took over London with his gang of newts, but was eventually pecked to death by a flock of vengeful pigeons.

In 94th place was *They Took The Eurostar To Bruges*, the 2008 remake of the wartime classic *They Flew to Bruges*, described by the panel as 'disappointing'. The new story-line centres on a group of old friends on a weekend break, who arrive in the mediaeval Belgian city imagining that they are in Paris.

Fun starts when one elderly couple set out to find the Eiffel Tour but *(cont. p. 94.)*



MAN ARRESTED FOR 'LOOKING AT LANGHAM PICTURES'

by Our Crime Staff **P.D. O'Phile**

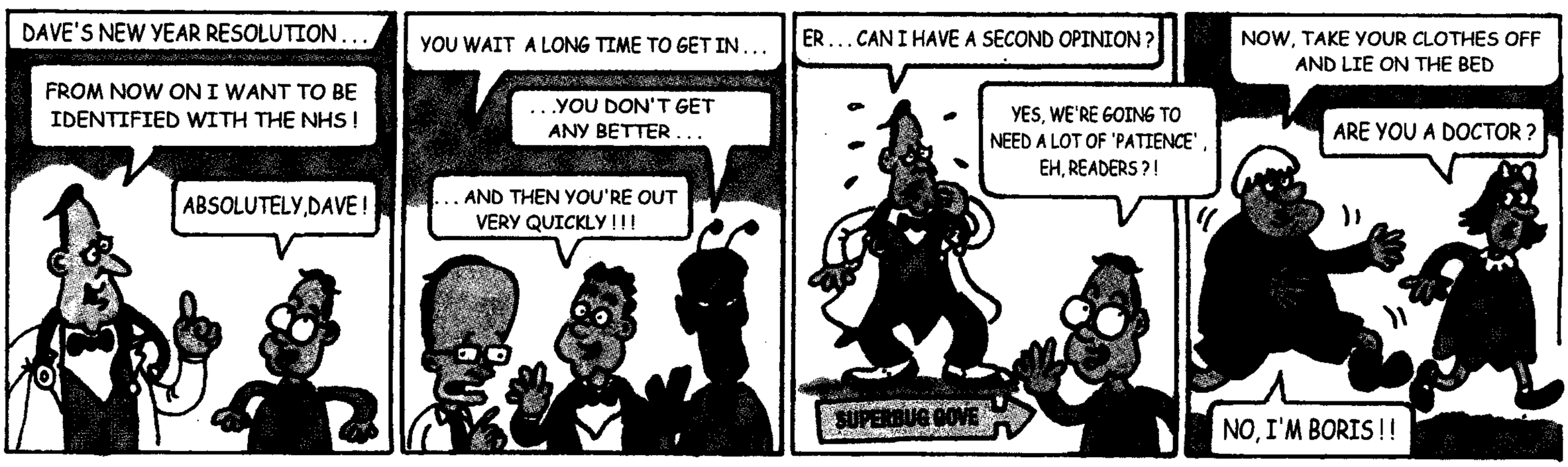
A MAN who cannot be named for legal reasons has admitted looking at images of Chris Langham, although he claims he only did it "for research purposes".

The man saw the images in the Observer newspaper as well as on BBC TV, under the title *'My Child Porn Hell By TV Star'*.

"I feel ashamed now," said the man. "I looked at the pictures, but surely no one could imagine that I got any pleasure out of it.

"The only possible reason for looking at these awful pictures of Chris Langham is to try and imagine why anyone would give him the opportunity to claim that he was innocent all along *(cont. p. 94)*

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


DAVE'S NEW YEAR RESOLUTION . . .
FROM NOW ON I WANT TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH THE NHS !
ABSOLUTELY, DAVE !
YOU WAIT A LONG TIME TO GET IN . . .
. . . YOU DON'T GET ANY BETTER . . .
. . . AND THEN YOU'RE OUT VERY QUICKLY ! ! !
ER . . . CAN I HAVE A SECOND OPINION ?
YES, WE'RE GOING TO NEED A LOT OF 'PATIENCE', EH, READERS ? !
SUPERBUG GONE
NOW, TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF AND LIE ON THE BED
ARE YOU A DOCTOR ?
NO, I'M BORIS ! !

Wedding of the Year How They Are Related

Laurence Fox

Edward the Confessor
|
Edward the Seventh
|
Edward the Fox
|
Eddie the Eagle
|
Dr Liam Fox
|
Lawrence of Arabia
|
Samantha Fox

Billie Piper

The Pied Piper
|
Tom Tom (the piper's son)
|
Billie the Kid
|
Billie du Jour
|
Bel de Mooney
|
Billie du Piper
|
Dr Who

(Is this right? We're a bit shortstaffed over New Year. Ed.)

BISHOP COMPLAINS ABOUT 'NO-GO' AREAS

by Our Religious Staff **M.T. Pews**

THE CONTROVERSIAL Bishop of Neasden the Right Reverend Tariq Ali shocked the nation yesterday by claiming that there were certain "no-go" areas in the country for British people.

Said the bishop, "People don't want to go in these places which are known locally as "churches".

He continued, "ordinary members of the public are terrified that they will be harassed by women offering them tea and biscuits and pressing them to come along to join the choir, so they don't go."

No God Areas

"No wonder," he said, "that these churches remain alien to the majority: *(cont. Psalm 94)*.

Advertisement

NEW YEAR? NEW YOU?

Why not take out a loan or set up a mortgage you can ill afford?

What about getting a credit card that allows you to spend money you haven't got?

Then pay it all off in an instant with Gnome-Loan. Simply contact us at gnome-loan.co.uk and all your problems with be just starting.

ME AND MY SPOONY-WOON

RUSSELL BRAND

Do you have a favourite spoon?

I've 'ad thousands of spoons, haven't I? I've 'ad them all... short spoons, tall ones, skinny ones. I've been a right old spoonbender in my time guvnor, if you get my drift, and done things with spoons that I never oughtn't not to have done neither if it so pleases you.

So how did you conquer your spoon addiction?

I went to Spoony jail didn't I where they stop you dunkin' your spoony-woon for a month, so help me if they didn't, in the hope of curing my obsessive spoonophilia if you get my drifty-wift, as dear old Anthony Burgess might say.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No-y-wo.

NEXT WEEK: *Russell Crowe. Me and My Crowe.*

News In Brief

McCARTNEY TO HAVE WALLET SURGERY

NEWS has emerged that Beatles legend Paul McCartney will soon undergo an operation which will see excessive amounts of money removed from his wallet.

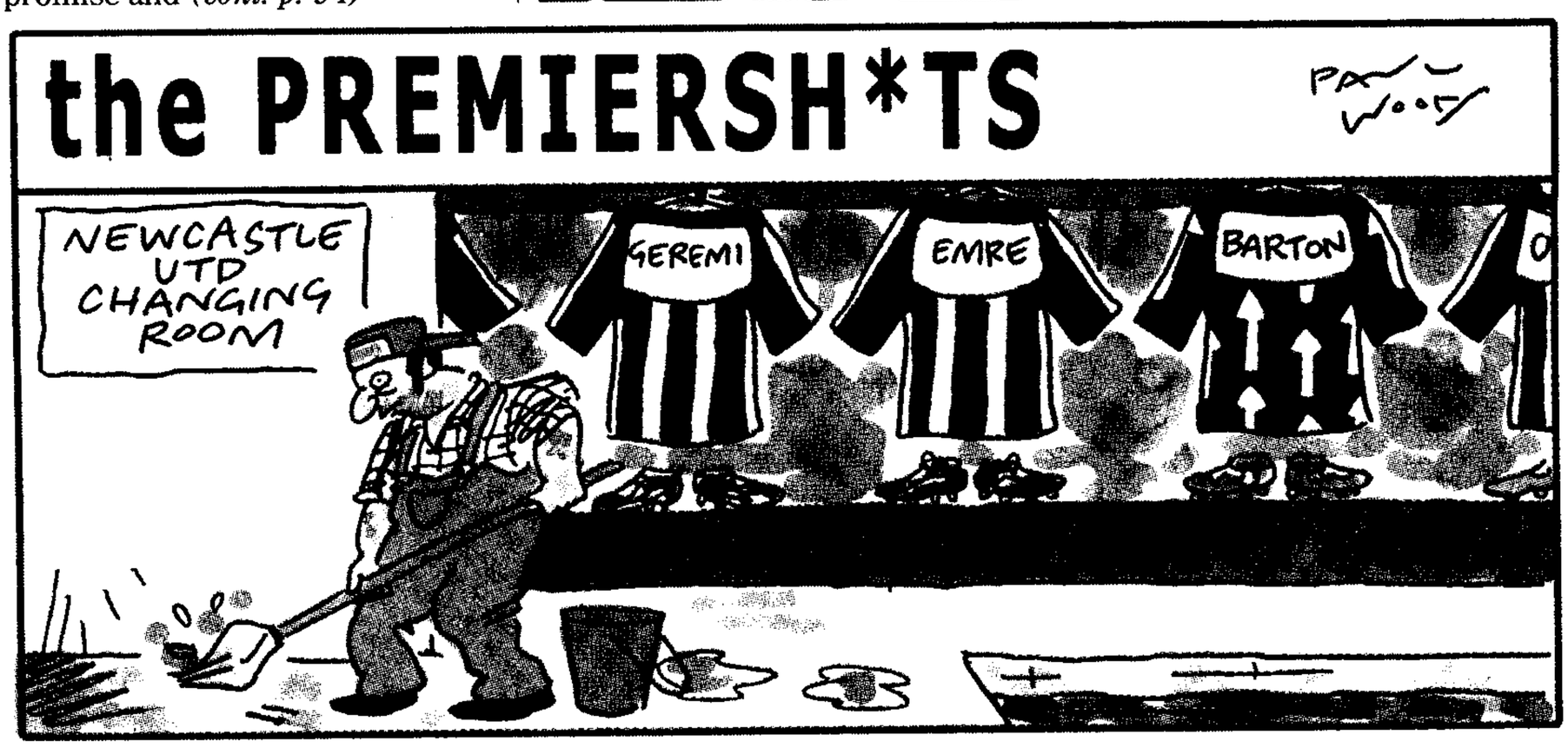
A leading divorce lawyer said, "It's a simple procedure which we often perform on men of his age – first of all we make an incision in his wallet, and then we stitch him up by bleeding him dry."

BROWN POLICY SHOCK

NO. 10 sources have privately confirmed reports that Prime Minister Gordon Brown will now allow 24-hour sulking to continue.

"It was widely thought that the Prime Minister would scrap his 24-hour sulking in 2008, but sources close to him say that he will be performing a U-turn on this promise and *(cont. p. 94)*

the PREMIERSH*TS



EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

Ten to watch in 2008

by Phil Space

The Eye's guide to the up-and-coming stars of tomorrow

FILM **Foxella Fox**, 23, known as 'Foxy'. Already acclaimed by critics for her cameo as the stripper in BBC's new adaption of *Mansfield Park*. Currently in Hollywood filming action picture *Bushwacker 3* with Johnny Depp.

BOOKS **Winona Hatterjii**, 19. Still at Cambridge, student Winona's novella *Shooting Up* has been bought by Bloomsbury's top talent spotter Anoushka Babouska who says, "Winona's account of the Chinese West African heroin community is a breath-taking *tour de force* which is bound to be shortlisted for the Booker Prize."

MUSIC **Phukka**, 19, (real name Mathew Wemyss). Rap artist Phukka has burst onto the scene with the most downloaded track of 2007, *Phukkaoff!* Originally at Charterhouse with fellow Old Carthusians, Schhit (Simon St. Clair-Grant), Wankah (Justin FotheringtonSmythe) and Respeck (Tristan de la Warr-ffrench), Phukka's fusion of hardcore dirt track and urban filtertip will make him the most sought-after act until January 31st 2008.

ART **Milly Wainwright**, 19. Although only six months into her art school course, Milly has quite literally set the art world alight with her self-combustible artefacts. Said curator Sir Nicholas Arsota, "The point of these works is you never know when they are going to catch fire. It could be at any moment, which is very exciting."

SPORT **Tariq Aswad**, 17. Hull City's No.2 keeper is already looking like Fabio Cappelo's number one choice for England goalie. Aswad has kept a clean sheet for the 5 minutes he came on against Scunthorpe in November 2007.

FASHION **Yakimota Tamagotchi**, 25, handpicked by Bianco Fratelli to head up his new London-based flagship label *Tutti Frutti*. 'Yaki' promises that her Spring collection will be an exciting blend of East and North.

TV **Kirsty McSpangle**, 21, currently fronting BBC Grampian's *Hullo Grampians*, is hotly tipped to take over as Sky's chief newsreader on the coveted 3am slot when veteran Geoff Baldie, 36, hangs up his earpiece in April.

FOOD **Rick Chutney**, 26, has been hailed by *Food and Foodmen* magazine as 'the most innovative newcomer to the cuisine scene in the last 3 weeks'. His new restaurant *Chutneys*, offering a range of 547 different chutneys from all over Britain, has already been closed by Health and Safety officers from Harringey's go-ahead borough council.

JOURNALISM **Phillipa Space**, 17, daughter of veteran journalist Phil Space who has already made her mark by compiling the above list from all the other lists printed in newspapers over the holiday period *(cont. p. 94)*.

THE BROON-ITES
THE RULING RABBLE RELAUNCHING THEIR RUBBISHNESS!
Fountain and Jamieson
CRIVVENS! WHIT IS GORDON PLAYIN' AT?
HE'S PUTTING THA' MOCKERS ON AN' NAE MISTAKE!
JOCKSHIRE POST GLOOM AN' DOOM SAYS GORD
JOCKSHIRE RECORD ECONOMY IS FAIR PLUGGED SAYS PM
JOCKSHIRE EVENING TIMES PA BROON: WE'RE UP TAE OOR FIZZERS IN WOE
HENRY DAVIES
GORDON, I KEN WE WERE RELAUNCHIN' OOR ADMINISTRATION...
BUT NOW YE'VE MADE A SPEECH SAYIN' WE'RE GOIN' TAE HELL IN AN AULD HAUND-CART!
HAUD YER WHEEST, MA BAIRNS,
...IT'S JUST MA OWN BROON PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK!
STRIDE
BROON PSYCHOLOGY? IS THA' A WEE BIT LIKE THA' REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY??
LIKE YE SAY WE'RE DAEING REALLY BADLY TAE DISTRACT FROM THA' FACT WE'RE NAE DOING SO BAD AT ALL?
SO THA' EVERYBODY GETS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED, THE NOO?
NAE, YE SCUNNERS. BROON PSYCHOLOGY IS WHEN I SAY WE'RE DAEING REALLY BADLY...
PUFF
PUFF
BLAZE
...TAE DISTRACT FROM THA' FACT WE'RE ACTUALLY DAEING UTTER UTTER SHITE!
CRIVVENS, JINGS AND AULD LANG SYNE!
Virgin
ON STRIKE UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
SHIVER
FUEL BILL
GAS BILL
COUNCIL TAX
CONFIDENTIAL CDs
PROPERTY OF ROYAL MARSDEN
NOROVIRUS

"That myrrh you ordered online has finally arrived"

THERE'S no other word for it. It's a complete disaster. The horrific scenes coming out of Kenya can only mean one thing. We're probably going to have to cancel our safari.

I know, it's too ghastly to contemplate, especially since I bought a new bush wardrobe and the useless Simon has bought a very expensive new camera just for the trip! Plus, we've already booked toddler Charlie into the Fun Lodge Toddler Hotel in Newbury (24-hour childcare for up to a month!!), so that we can enjoy two weeks of five-star, stress-free spa 'n' safari experience, courtesy of Excess Traveller Magazine!

And the situation is getting worse – the violence is already out of hand, as I kicked the door to the utility room very hard when I heard the latest news from Nairobi on Radio 2!! And the instability is increasing – Simon was really ratty yesterday, even when he was watching Richard Hammond's World of Jeremy Clarkson on UK Dave More Plus One.

HONESTLY! Where is it all going to end? Surely we're not going to have to slum it in Morocco again? Or Dubai? The whole thing is a nightmare and one can only pray for peace and reconciliation to return to this benighted country in time for our connecting flight from Heathrow.

© Polly Filler.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd, Obituarist

So. Farewell
Then Hugh Montgomery-Massingberd.

Obituarist in
The *Daily Telegraph*.

But alas. You
Are not around
To write
Your own.

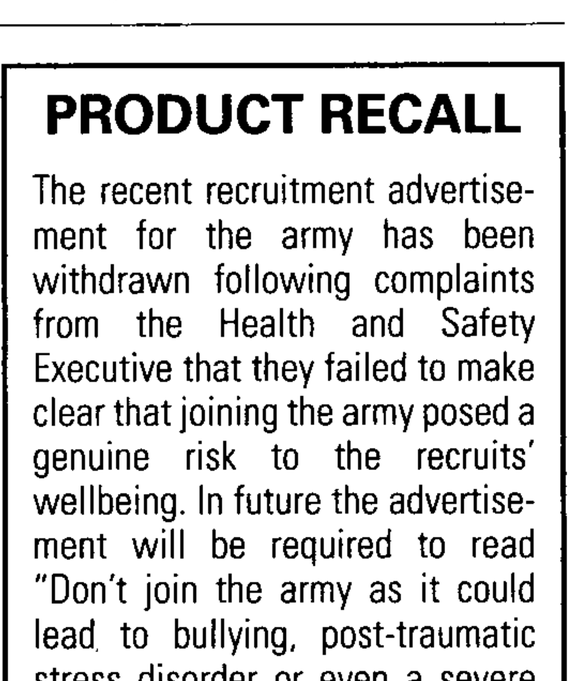
E.J. Thribb (17½)

8.00 Two Civilisation: Facing The Dead Joseph Stalin's rule over the Soviet Union, during which some people were killed.

TV listing – Metro Life, Dublin

PRODUCT RECALL

The recent recruitment advertisement for the army has been withdrawn following complaints from the Health and Safety Executive that they failed to make clear that joining the army posed a genuine risk to the recruits' wellbeing. In future the advertisement will be required to read "Don't join the army as it could lead to bullying, post-traumatic stress disorder or even a severe loss of life".



AUSTEN ADAPTATION WOWS PUBLIC

by Our Media Staff **Colonel Russell Brandon**

YES! Jane Austen has done it again with her usual trick of taking out all the sex from Andrew Davies's raunchy love romp and turning it into a polite comedy of manners.

Austen maintains that, "Beneath the obvious erotic surface of Davies's *Sex and Sexability* there is a society heaving with bonnets, carriages and card games".

"Why shouldn't I miss out a few sex scenes and shove in a quadrille or two?" Jane protested. "I mean just because it's the 18th century doesn't mean they didn't like a good dance?"

Critics, however, have accused Austen of cynically stripping out the essentials of Davies's classic bonkfest in the hope of appealing to a literary audience.

"She is just out to get readers," said TV's Mark Lawson, "It's pathetic and obvious."

Jane Austen is 191.

THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE

BY THE REV. TAWDRY

Part 94. Chaos at Christmas

THOMAS and all the other engines are in the shed. "We won't be needing you lot," said the Fat Controller. "It's holiday time, when everyone wants to travel, so we've shut down the network."

Thomas looked glum. "So will we be back at work for the New Year?" he asked.

"Oh no," laughed the Fat Controller. "That's when we're going to do big repair works."

Two days later, Thomas and his friends were still stuck in the shed.

"What's happened now?" asked Thomas.

"Our repairs have over-run," laughed the Fat Controller. "So you'll have a few more days off. And then, with any luck, there'll be snow so we won't have to do anything."

"But why are you so happy?" Asked Thomas. "Won't they fine you millions of pounds for the late repairs?'

"Oh yes," chuckled the Fat Controller, "but that doesn't worry us. We'll simply put the fares up to pay for the fines."

The Fat Controller was then driven home in his big shiny car to celebrate being given a knighthood in the New Year's Honours List and a suitably *fat* bonus!

The End

New Year's Honours List

Cont. from p. 1

for services to speed camera development in the Isle of Wight; **P.Q. Flipchart**, co-ordinator of customer services, Godalming Cemetery; **Sandra Satnav**, facilitator of the 'Five-a-day Organic School Meals Project, Suffolk'.

MRSA (Overseas)

Bruce Goose, Assistant Chief Warden, the Max Hastings Penguin Reserve (Falkland Islands), for services to penguin conservation; **Insp. Christian Fletcher-Knacker**, head of anti-paedophile unit (Pitcairn Islands), for services to locking up the rest of the population; **Arnold Cervantes**, proprietor of the All-Day Full English Public House, Gibraltar, for services to British cuisine.

Royal Victorian Order Of The Soap Dish

Lady Letitia Starborgling, Finder of the Queen's Spectacles, Balmoral Castle; **Adolf Hitman**, Keeper of the Fiat Uno for HRH Prince Philip; **Sir Alan Fitztightly**, Squeezer of the Royal Toothpase to HRH the Prince of Wales; **Sergeant Sid Nozzer**, Picker-Up from the Gutter to HRH the Prince Harry. *(That's enough Honours. Ed.)*

WEALTHER FORECAST

What You Missed

The Today Programme

7.43 am

E. Stourton *(for it is he)*: Now, with the time at 7.44, are we heading for a recession? Professor Bankbore, as a leading government advisor, do you think we are going to have a recession?

Bankbore: Certainly not. There's been far too much idle speculation about a recession. The only danger is that we will talk ourselves into a recession.

Stourton: So is there a danger of a recession?

Bankbore: Only if we keep going on and on about it.

Stourton: Like we're doing now?

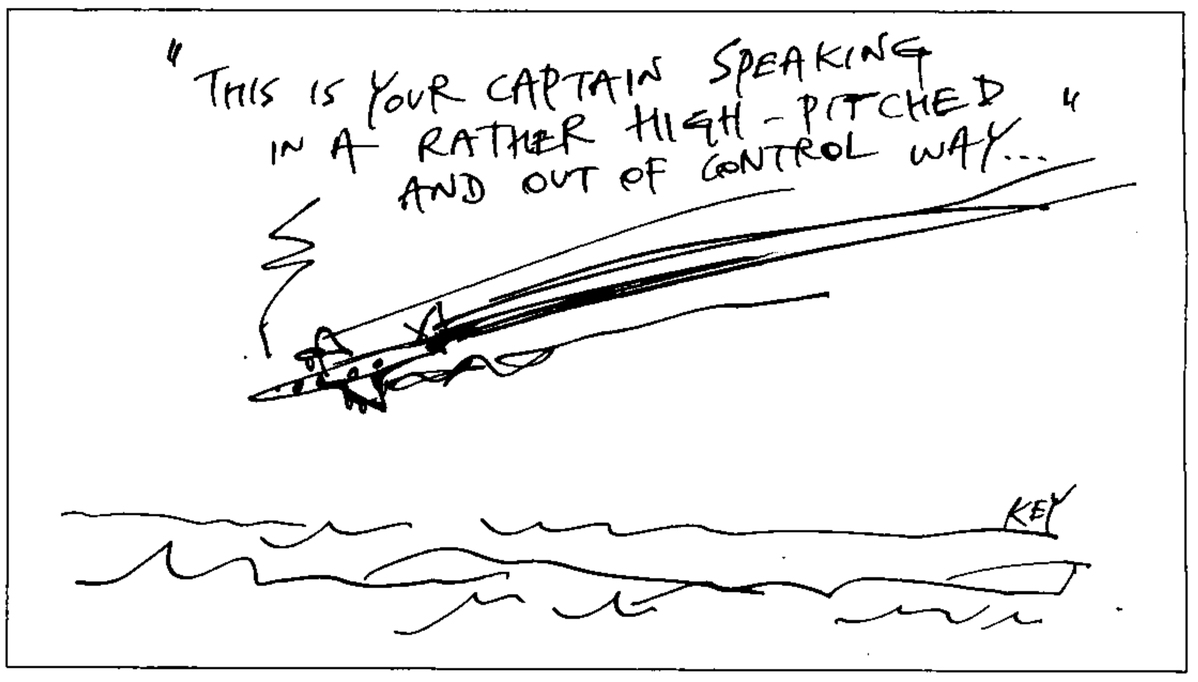
Bankbore: Yes.

Stourton: So if we carry on talking like this, about how there might be a recession, even though there won't be one, then there might be one after all?

Bankbore: Er... yes.

Stourton: Thank you, Professor. And now the news, read by Charlotte Green...

Green: A senior Government advisor told this programme that a major recession was now inevitable. Professor Bankbore warned that *(cont. 94 kHz)*



Have you read too many detox pieces over the holiday?

by Jan Filler

WE'VE all done it, haven't we? Overdosed on articles in the newspapers telling us how to stop drinking and eating?

But now the Eye can exclusively offer you a three-step plan to clean out your system and feel thoroughly detoxed of irritating pieces tell-ing you how to be miserable!

The Eye's Three Step Plan In Full

Day One: Throw away the Daily Mail.

Day Two: Er...

Day Three: That's it!

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Advertisement

ST CAKES SCHOOL

('Quis paget entrat')

New 'A' Level courses from January 2008. We now offer the following subjects from the EZY Examination Board.

● **Falling off a Log** ● **Pie Studies** ● **Lemon Squeezing**

Apply now to

The Bursar, Major N.P. St J. Karadic, c/o The Bunker.

ST CAKES

Putting the 'A' back into Pass!

"Oi, are you lookin' at my Birds?*"*

BLAIR CONFESSION

DIARY

HOW TO BE LIKE WHAT I AM

by JANET STREET-PORTER

HOW TO GET A TOP JOB

Listen, I never did university, I never studied classix or whatever. Who wants fuddy-duddy Latins shoved down your throat, that's what I say. But I have run departments of 250 people (375 before I got rid of the excess baggage), edited a national newspaper until I got bored and been a high-powered media executive who told people what to do.

Remember you are special. Or at least you aren't but I am.

I never thought I couldn't do something. When I'm flying first class in a top-quality luxury airplane, I summon the stewardess. "Life's too short to serve the other passengers with their fucking miniature bottles of chardonnay or whatever," I say. "Take me to the fucking cockpit."

Not many people know that every aeroplane is made up of two wings and a cockpit. The cockpit's where the captain sits, looking out the window for birds and clouds and that. "Janet'll take over now," I say, and I grab his little hat and push him to one side.

Anyone can be a pilot. Easy-fucking-peasy. Why shouldn't you, just 'cos your a woman? Live the dream. But don't forget to multi-task. You got to hold the steering wheel in one hand and your glass in the other and shout your bloody head off at any approaching vehicles.

Remember that Joni Fucking Mitchell song, "I've looked at life from both sides now but clouds got in my way"? What she on about, then? What I say is, "Shut it, love!" Why let a cloud get in your bloody way? It's only made of fluff or whatever. Just tell it to fuck the fuck off, that's what I say.

HOW TO MAKE A SALAD

Get a lettuce.

Now get a tomato.

Cut them all up and bung them in a bowl.

If anyone complains there's no dressing tell them to shut the fuck up.

HOW TO MAKE A MEAL IN LITERALLY SECONDS

Here's a literally brill tip for a fast, no-nonsense meal you can eat in seconds, leaving you plenty of time to make that award-winning docu-drama or whatever.

Step One. Go to your local supermarket and get one of the assistants to show you where the food is.

Step Two. Get another assistant to take a Mars Bar to the counter. All you got to do is pay for the fucking thing. Shazam! You got a perfect meal in your hands.

Step Three. Oh – and remember to take the wrapper off else you'll get a mouthful of fucking paper in your mouth.

HOW TO MAKE A MEAL FOR THAT SPECIAL OCCASION

If it's a special occasion and you want to do something fancy with it, just bung the Mars Bar in the blender with a bit of mayo and garlic. Then serve it to your well-known friends on a plate with a sprig of parsley or dill.

HOW TO KEEP FIT

Most of what you hear about keeping fit is a load of fucking crap, if you ask me.

What is it with exercise bikes? Talk about not working!

I once got on one at my local gym. I cycled like hell for half an hour but when I looked up to see where I was I found I'd got precisely nowhere! But I don't give up that easy, not me. That's not how you get to be a high-powered media executive in charge of 570 people, 400 after cuts. I mounted my own full-scale investigation and found that that so-called exercise bike was *nailed to the fucking floor.*

What sort of con is that? So now if I really want exercise, I'll take it myself, thank you very much. Personally, I like to put on my hot-pants and stack-heels and "boogy on down" to all the latest hip sounds.

And why not sing along as you literally groove it on up to the beat? My neighbours must be sick to death of hearing me sing "Night Fever, Night Feee-verrrr" through the walls, or the very latest by the Beverley Sisters.

But what do they know about looking as great as you feel? They can just shut the fuck up for all I care.

HOW TO HAVE A GREAT SOCIAL LIFE

I once slept with a very well-known artist after he'd given a major lecture at Cambridge University.

Next morning, he introduced me to a very well-known academic who'd just written a major book on linguistic philosophy so he came up with the best chat-up lines. Before I knew where I was we were in a phone box having a shag.

Men!

That afternoon, he introduced me to a very well-known pop star who'd just won a major award for charity work among kids or whatever in Africa or wherever.

One thing led to another and by teatime we were behind a light-blue four-door Volvo in an underground car-park together.

That evening, he introduced me to a very well-known film director who in turn introduced me to a very well-known TV chef.

By the end of the year, I had my own column on a national magazine, an award-winning prime-time radio programme with over a million listeners, an interesting community relations project underway, and what's more I counted two leading contemporary novelists and a senior diplomat among my close friends.

So when people come up to me and beg me to tell them how I do it I tell them it's all about multi-tasking.

HOW TO BE ME

When you wake up, lie still for two minutes.

Recite over and over again, I am bloody brilliant. I am great. I am Number One. Unique. I am worth it. I have several very well-known friends including many leading pop stars among them the former drummer with top group Showaddywaddy. I have won major TV awards. I have been a high-powered media executive in charge of 700 people before lay-offs. I am Janet Street-Porter.

Now open your eyes. Okay, so it was all a dream.

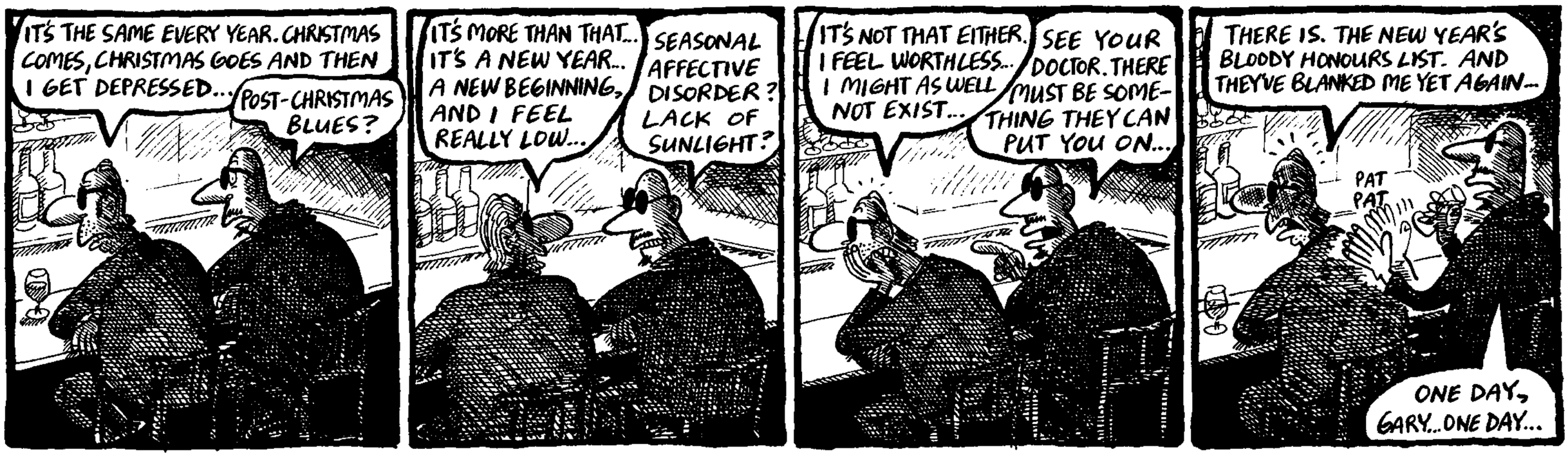
But for those two minutes, you must of felt fucking brill.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


IT'S THE SAME EVERY YEAR. CHRISTMAS COMES, CHRISTMAS GOES AND THEN I GET DEPRESSED...
POST-CHRISTMAS BLUES?
IT'S MORE THAN THAT... IT'S A NEW YEAR... A NEW BEGINNING, AND I FEEL REALLY LOW...
SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER? LACK OF SUNLIGHT?
IT'S NOT THAT EITHER. I FEEL WORTHLESS... I MIGHT AS WELL NOT EXIST...
SEE YOUR DOCTOR. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING THEY CAN PUT YOU ON...
THERE IS. THE NEW YEAR'S BLOODY HONOURS LIST. AND THEY'VE BLANKED ME YET AGAIN...
PAT PAT
ONE DAY, GARY... ONE DAY...

Literary Review

They couldn't make it up...

The Book of Other People
Edited by Zadie Smith
(Hamish Hamilton, £16.99)

The Paris Review Interviews, Vol 2
(Canongate, £12.99)

THE start of a new year brings, amidst the valiant resolutions, some self-searching questions for writers. How am I doing? How far will I go? What will I leave behind?

For newly established writers a sure sign of their having in a career sense "arrived" must be their invitation to appear in an anthology such as Zadie Smith's *The Book of Other People*. The fact that the book's object is to raise money and awareness for the charity 826 New York, a young writers' project founded by one of the book's contributors, Dave Eggers, can only add to the kudos. There can be few surer signs of professional confidence than a willingness to help your potential future competitors. But then perhaps it is more a case of recruiting acolytes to a brotherhood (the brotherhood in question being Eggars's cliquey American literary magazine, *McSweeney's*).

Zadie Smith has by accident or design found herself in a similar role over here, as the standard-bearer for British writers overlappingly grouped by age, multi-cultural credibility and a commendable rejection of the obsession with Form and Style that has so marred the work of the preceding (Amis/Barnes/Rushdie) generation. A return to the staid satisfactions of intelligent fiction based on credible plot and character deserves encouragement, and Smith in her role as editor (and in her own contribution, "Hanwell Snr") certainly tries to provide it. Her problem, and the book's, is that so few of her contributors were able or willing to meet the challenge.

As she writes in her introduction: "The instruction was simple: *make somebody up.*" Her hope was that the book might demonstrate that "there are as many ways to create 'character' (or deny the possibility of 'character') as there are writers."

Some contributors take this as their cue to create monsters, either literally (as in "The Monster", an inarticulate specimen of dinosaur-like fauna imagined by Toby Litt) or metaphorically (as in "Judith Castle", the monologue of a monstrous self-deceiving bore, by David Mitchell). Some simply come up with caricatures, such as Jonathan Safran Foer's elderly Jewish lady, "Rhoda", a bundle of predictable prejudices, and A M Homes's heartless rich-bitch stereotype, "Cindy Stubenstock".

Others, such as Justin M Damiano ("Daniel Clowes"), Nick Hornby ("J Johnson") and Chris Ware ("Jordan Wellington Lint"), draw on cartoons to flesh out characters which words alone fail to individualise (but which inevitably remain just cartoon characters). Several stories (including Damiano's film critic, Hornby's disappointed novelist and Andrew O'Hagan's "Gordon"), seem to be about writers, usually a sign that the author needs to get out more.

Another curiously common characteristic is the sexual voracity of several writers' female creations: Hari Kunzru's "Magda Mandela", Vendela Vida's "Soleil" and Adam Thirlwell's "Nigora" (this last offering conveniently hacked off a forthcoming novel).

Out of 23 contributors, only four or five can be said to have created a satisfying story about a memorable character. This is a shame because readable short story anthologies are rarer now than ever, and readers who pay full price for the book deserve something better than this rather hit-and-miss sampler.

The interviews with more senior writers that make up the second *Paris Review* selection range from the 1950s (Graham Greene, William Faulkner) to the present decade (Peter Carey, Stephen King). To gain access to this literary hall of fame, a writer must have done more than simply arrive; they must almost be ready to depart. Posterity looms.

And yet the questions are so banal! Alice Munro is asked "You use notebooks?" Eudora Welty is asked "Do you typewrite?" Toni Morrison is asked to confirm what make of pencil she favours. Though there may be some weird trainspotterish appeal for trivia-hungry fans in all this, the main point is that these are successful writers going along with the illusion, encouraged by fawningly reverential questioning, that they are dispensing wisdom of a kind that will help and inspire all those who hope to follow in their footsteps.

Not all of the victims are so easily impressed. Faulkner declares, disarmingly: "I am not a literary man but only a writer. I don't get any pleasure from talking shop."

Philip Larkin, though prepared to divulge his daily routine and stationery preferences, tetchily refuses to be drawn on the genesis of his poems: "I can't understand these chaps who go round American universities explaining how they write poems; it's like going round explaining how you sleep with your wife."

Graham Greene is pithier still: "For a writer to spend much of his time in the company of authors is, you know, a form of masturbation."

One doesn't want to rub it in, but you sort of see his point.

WHAT YOU REALLY WILL MISS

GEORGE MACDONALD FRASER –
Flashman and the Grim Reaper (being the 13th and final instalment of the Flashman Papers)

So there I was, still in my nightshirt d*mn it (I'd been tupping the parlour-maid down in the butler's pantry, you'll understand) when all of a sudden there was a terrific rumbling sound – like all Cardigan's chargers at Balaclava farting at the same time – and I fetched up in some deuced queer spot hedged about with clouds, with a line of wrought-iron gates rising in front of me.

"Hold on Flash," I said to myself, "this ain't Piccadilly Circus, not by a long chalk," and sure enough a stiff old cove in a get-up you don't see outside those exhibitions of Greek dancing they have at the Haymarket steered into view with what looked like a register in his hand.

"Flashman ain't it?" he said, pretty sharpish.

"That's the ticket," I shot back, not liking the look of him above half, nor the fields beyond the gate which looked uncommon like the big meadow at Rugby.

"Sir Harry Flashman I believe?" he said again, a bit more civil now. That's more like it, I thought, waving a hand that two minutes before had been squeezing the parlour-maid's t*ts, and he ran his finger down the entries in the register – just like that b*****d Arnold used to do in Big School before he set about my backside with the cane – and said, "I believe I have the honour of welcoming Brigadier-General Sir Harry Flashman, VC, Queen's Medal and Thanks of Parliament?"

"Christ!" I said to myself, "he's only gone and looked me up in *Who's Who*. He don't know the half of it." Anyway, never quarrel with the size of an heiress's bouncers, as we used to say in the 11th Hussars. I'd just begun sauntering in through the gates, thinking that Heaven ought to run to a domestic or two, because the hinges creaked like a whore on the prison treadmill, when a weaselly-looking chap who was passing by sings out: "That's Flashman! He's a coward, a fornicator and a liar. On no account let him in sir!"

B****r me if it wasn't that swine Scud East from Rugby. Never forgiven me for leaving him in the lurch that time in the Crimea, thinks I. Anyhow, as you'll know, I'm a dab hand at flying the coop, and if you've ever given the slip to Bismarck's hired assassins then, believe me, St Peter is pretty small beer, so I nipped back through the gates in double-quick time before East had finished bawling the odds (and precious little good it did him, the conniving b*****d) and was down a flight of steps and standing at the entrance to what looked like a pit of fiery brimstone before you could say "Disraeli was a sheeny".

There was a tall chap all dressed in black with a cowl and a sickle over his shoulder waiting by the door – don't tell me I've fetched up at the Reform Club again, I told myself – and when he saw me he said, "Flashman! You are a wastrel, an adulterer and a poltroon" – buttering me up, you see – "ripe to be flung into the outer darkness."

"It ain't that dark, surely?" I told him. "And if you've got any – ah – fallen women on the premises I'm sure I could organise 'em on commercial lines." I know those demonic types, you see – there were plenty of them in Madagascar when I was there in the '40s – and if there's one thing they're partial to it's living off immoral earnings. "Flashy's Satanic knocking shop," I thought to myself. Doesn't sound half bad.... [*Sadly, not to be continued*]

Pseuds Corner

On a more aesthetic level, he began to realise that his verbal inventiveness made him an heir to the Dadaists, serving 'to interrupt and alter language' and thereby escape the 'homogenised and bland'. Hence the metonymic playfulness and such alliterative phrases as 'winky water' and 'Disneyland for my Dinkle'.

CHRISTOPHER HART interviews RUSSELL BRAND, *Sunday Times*

Houses have to have character. You must let your house become its unique self. I always tell my daughters, 'Husbands come and go, but whatever you do, hang on to your curtain-maker.' There are very few curtain-makers left now. It's sad, really, isn't it?'

NINA CAMPBELL,
Sunday Telegraph 'Stella' **magazine**

Go buy an Xbox 360 and BioShock…it is a game about the illusion of choice in video games wrapped around a larger and less provocative rebuttal of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and her philosophy of objectivism.

CHRIS SUELLENTROP,
'The Gaming Club', Slate.com

The Swedish artist Klara Liden originally trained as an architect, and given the content of her video work it's tempting to imagine the punk-ish aesthetic of her own architectural designs. For now, though, we must content ourselves with her small but stimulating show currently occupying the Hayward Project Space on the South Bank.

There are four films, the most recent being *Bodies of Society* (2006), featuring the artist stalking a bicycle in her front room before attacking it with a crow bar.

PETER CHAPMAN,
'The Information', *Independent*

I had an image once about what is a man and what is a woman. The man is a tree. He's big, he's beautiful, moves the leaves, makes the shadow. We like to hug him. The roots of the tree is the woman. Without the roots he won't survive. We feed him to make him look good, preserve him. But it takes two together to make the tree healthy. The man can take the spotlight but only with the woman behind him. For me it's the tree of life.

CELINE DION,
Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

Le Meridien creates a culturally refined, meaningful and stimulating atmosphere which inspires participants to celebrate the beauty of a moment and the possibilities for insight that live within common occurrences.

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CONTRIBUTORS: Carolyn Whitehead, J. James, Tim Minogue, Nicholas Wood, Mike Bor, Kevin O'Flynn

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE LOCKERBIE APPEAL

You cannot be Syria

THERE were ominous signs in the Scottish appeal court before Christmas that the government was determined to continue its part in what the UN observer described as the "obfuscation of reality" over the Lockerbie bombing.

Senior Scottish judges, who are to conduct the appeal of Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi, jailed for life for the atrocity, were told that the government would be claiming it was not in the public interest to disclose at least one document, believed to be crucial to the Libyan's defence and to uncovering the truth about how and why 270 people died when the Pan Am 103 flight was blasted from the sky 19 years ago.

The document is understood to relate indirectly to the timer alleged to have detonated the bomb and said to provide the crucial link to Libya and Megrahi. Originating from an unspecified "foreign" country (not, as *Eye* 1195 mistakenly believed was the US), the document formed one of the six grounds identified by the Scottish criminal cases review commission (SCCRC) for concluding that Megrahi may be innocent. Furthermore, the SCRCC ruled that suppression of the document and other evidence at his trial was in itself also a ground for appeal.

Since then, however, Megrahi's lawyers have failed in their attempts to get hold of it and other material relating to forensic tests, which have been kept secret. They were hoping the appeal judges would order that it all be handed over last month, after prosecutors failed to meet a promised deadline for disclosure. But after hearing that Whitehall was going to claim public interest immunity (PII) over the foreign document, saying it did not have that country's permission to pass it over, the appeal judges have given the crown more time. However, m'lords criticised prosecutors over the delay.

Given that the SCCRC has had access to the disputed document, and found it central to the case, it would seem extraordinary if it were to be withheld from Megrahi's defence and appeal. But arguments about whose public interest is served by withholding the document – Scottish justice and the families of the 270 who perished that day or an unidentified foreign power – are now on hold until the end of February when the court reconvenes.

As Jim Swire, whose daughter Flora was one of the Lockerbie victims, said: "It flies in the face of one of the basic tenets of Scottish criminal justice, which is equality of arms between the two sides in the case. The defence can't even find out which foreign country we are all talking about."

That is a matter for speculation. But certainly during Megrahi's trial in the Netherlands, the defence was trying to get hold of documents from Syria to back up its contention that the timer used to blow up the plane actually originated from a factory on the outskirts of Damascus – not, as the prosecution claimed, from a firm in Switzerland which had supplied 20 to Libya.

German police and other intelligence agencies had been linking the Pan Am 103 explosion to a Syrian-backed terrorist cell operating out of Frankfurt. They had after all discovered altitude sensitive bombs, designed for aircraft, packed in cassette recorders with timing devices triggered to start at a height of 3,000ft. They were calculated to blow an aircraft up between 30 and 45 minutes after take off (Pan Am 103 exploded over Lockerbie 38 minutes after leaving Heathrow).

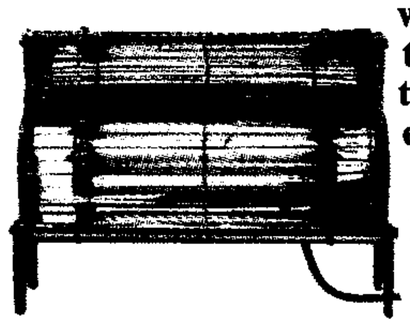
Eye readers well know the many flaws and inconsistencies in the prosecution case that it was a sophisticated Swiss timer which was triggered in Malta but did not explode until several hours and two flight changes later. There was the professed discovery of a tiny fragment at the disaster site, through to its identification by MoD scientists, not to mention tortuous links to Malta and highly questionable identification of Megrahi – 11 years after the event – by the Maltese shopkeeper (another ground of appeal identified by the SCCRC).

If, as appears to be the case, this document casts light on this pivotal piece of evidence, much more than the reputation of Scottish justice depends on its public disclosure.

HEATING GRANTS

Cold comfort

WARM FRONT, a government scheme to help vulnerable people heat their homes, has left pensioners shivering this winter after the company that runs caused a waiting list of more than six months due to a shortage of engineers.



Mary and George Anastasiadis from Sherborne, Dorset, were assessed for a Warm Front grant last May and were awarded the maximum £2,700 to help them install adequate gas central heating. George is disabled and is cared for by Mary, who has arthritis. Despite having paid their contribution of £800 towards the new heating in October, they spent a cold Christmas with just an electric heater in their living room.

The government-funded initiative is run by the company EAGA, which appoints regional agents to install heating. In the South West, the boiler installation contract is held by EAGA subsidiary Iguana Services.

A spokesperson for EAGA told the *Eye* that it apologised for the long delay to Mr and Mrs Anastasiadis, which was "due to an unforeseen shortage of engineers" in the region. He said the vast majority of Warm Front customers had their heating within the deadlines set by the government. Mr and Mrs Anastasiadis have now been told their heating should be installed by the end of January.

Dorset MP Oliver Letwin is seeking an adjournment debate on Warm Front and EAGA's monopoly on the scheme. He says he has gathered plenty of evidence from his constituency that EAGA takes too long to deliver its promises to vulnerable people.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

60% Rise in wholesale gas prices which NPower says it has no choice to pass on to customers as 17.2% price rise

60% Proportion of net income which NPower's parent company RWE proposes to pass on as dividend to shareholders this year

DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

Caught in the Actis

MORE on the shocking way that UK development funds intended for investment in the world's poorest countries have massively enriched a bunch of very lucky British fatcats.

In recent months the *Eye* has chronicled how Hilary Benn, when International Development Secretary, created Actis, a private investment management firm, to manage the UK's development funds belonging to the state-owned CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Though we reported that Actis was handed to senior CDC executives for a fraction of its value without any competition, this was not strictly true. It has now emerged that the suits were in fact *paid* millions for taking the hugely profitably business off the taxpayer's hands.

The *Eye* has found documents buried in the House of Commons library that reveal the deal's financing. They include a crucial "members' agreement" showing how much each of the Actis bosses paid for his stake. Top dog Paul Fletcher (pictured), for example, paid £25,710 for a share that now nets him over £1m a year doing a job for which he previously earned a quarter of that.

More staggering still is that Fletcher and co didn't have to put their hands in their pockets even to raise the derisory £373,000 they together paid for 60 percent of Actis. In a secret last-minute amendment to the sale agreement dated 1 July 2004, it was agreed that CDC, ie the taxpayer, would give Actis a "post transactional bonus" of £2.3m once the sale went through, to be shared among management and staff.

Actis won't say who pocketed how much; but it's a fair bet the Actis partners did very nicely. Even the flagrant QinetiQ bonanza (*Eyes passim*) didn't involve stuffing cash into bosses' pockets *immediately*.

Back in 2004, when Benn confirmed the sale in the Commons, he made no mention of the bonus, leaving parliament and public with the impression that the deal involved just the £373k payment he had announced four months earlier.

The documents also give the lie to Benn's assurance in March 2004 that Actis would only earn enough from CDC to operate "on an approximately break-even basis over the first five years". In fact the Actis business plan, already then prepared, predicted profits of between $6m and $15m from 2004 to 2008. In the event even these figures have been exceeded, on the strength of which the National Audit Office recently put the firm's value at hundreds of millions of pounds. Although the government retains a 40 percent interest, a recent parliamentary question from Tory MP Tim Loughton reveals that the taxpayer hasn't received a penny from it.

The profits aren't surprising given Actis's fees, which the Department for International Development won't divulge to the *Eye* but which can now also be revealed. For managing existing CDC funds – handed to it on a plate – Actis is generally paid 2.5 percent management fees with an entitlement to 10 percent of fund profits, or "carried interest". For new funds this rises to 20 percent. Such fees compare very favourably with the rest of the private equity industry. What's more, carried interest payments also attract tax breaks as capital gains rather than income. Even after Chancellor Alistair Darling's recent changes, Fletcher and chums will pay just 18 percent tax on them, less than half the 40 percent higher income tax rate.

But then tax dodging was always of little concern to the ministers responsible. In an extraordinary letter dated February 2003, the then Treasury chief secretary Paul Boateng informed Benn's predecessor Clare Short: "As a shareholder of CDC, you will wish to allow it to engage in using offshore tax regimes but only to the extent that these are legal and transparent..." Thus Actis owns its investments in funds through a company registered in Mauritius (an island so transparent that company records are secret) in order to extract cash tax-free from poor countries that would otherwise impose "withholding" taxes.

Campaigning group Tax Justice Network estimates that tax havens cost the world's poorest countries £50bn every year, but few would have expected Britain's development fund to be in on the act.

Poor show

SO desperate is the Department for International Development to avoid scrutiny of the Actis deal it has stonewalled the *Eye's* freedom of information requests for nine months.

In response to a demand for the "members' agreement", officials from DfID's "Openness Unit" have promised replies within a month on *eight* separate occasions, only to come back each time saying their lawyers are still considering whether it would be in the public interest to hand it over.

In fact they knew the document was already filed in the House of Commons library and a correct answer would have to have said so. Hence the prevarication. So can they now send copies? A spokeswoman told the *Eye* that DfID's lawyers are now considering whether, although members of the public can go and view anything there (as an *Eye* hack has), the Commons library is part of "the public domain".

Raking it in

THE derisory £373,000 price for 60 percent of Actis upon its creation in 2004 (the calculation of which remains secret) was agreed by beancounters KPMG. Since then the same firm has gone on to... earn millions out of Actis.

In less than three years up to 2006 KPMG received £355,000 for auditing Actis and £796,000 for unspecified "other" services.

At the time of the valuation, KPMG was also home to Mark Russell, the man who now has the job of protecting the taxpayer's 40 percent interest in the firm at the Shareholder Executive unit of the Department for Business Environment and Regulatory Reform and who ought to be asking how 60 percent of it went for a song. He defends the deal, however, and insists he had no involvement in the Actis valuation.

In another twist, the head of KPMG as it abetted this dubious private equity deal was a certain Mike Rake (now Sir Mike, pictured), who has been drafted in to monitor the new code of conduct for private equity that the government has so warmly welcomed. So no conflicts of interest there, then.

Short changed

ACCORDING to Actis boss Paul Fletcher: "We are committed to creating successful, sustainable businesses in poor countries." And Actis is indeed required to make 70 percent of its new investments in "poorer" countries. But what does this mean in practice?

A parliamentary question from Labour MP Andrew Dismore reveals that only 9 percent of its African funds are placed in the poorest 25 percent of the continent. And the main investments there aren't exactly dedicated to impoverished locals.

The big deals since Actis's creation in 2004 include a Rwandan bank and a company mining gold in Congo but listed on the Canadian and US stock exchange. Then there are several firms owned through Actis's Globaleq energy group – established by CDC, formerly the Commonwealth Development Corporation, in 2002 before Actis took over management of its investments, "with the objective of capitalising on the withdrawal of the international power companies from emerging markets" – ie swooping on botched privatisations that saw prices multiply.

Unsurprisingly, given that its owners and staff are paid millions under short-term incentive schemes designed by consultants McKinsey, Actis doesn't stick with investments for long. Last year Globaleq off-loaded the privatised gas companies it owned in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Egypt and South America less than two years after acquiring most of them in a move that, according to Fletcher, "validated our investment thesis of countercyclical asset acquisitions..."

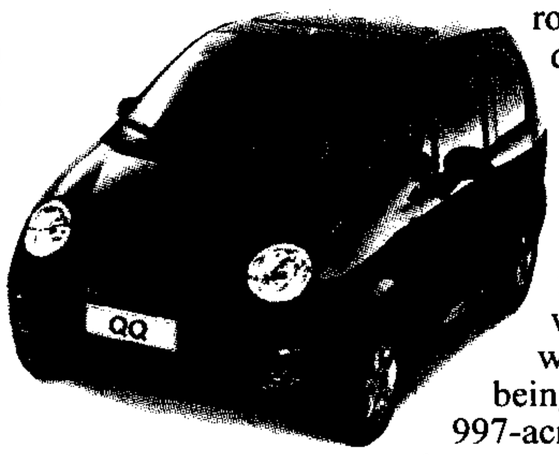
CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Making rupee with Tata

THE cheapest car in the world goes on show in Delhi this week when India's Tata Motors unveils its "one-lakh" (100,000 rupees, about £1,300) "People's Car", built with the help of Fiat.

Chairman Ratan Tata says he dreamed up the car to rescue poor Indian families from the perils of travelling en famille on scooters. In the UK, meanwhile, the ambitious firm is now top bidder to buy Jaguar and Land-Rover from Ford.

Although it began life in the mid-19th century helping the British sell opium to the Chinese, Tata is unique among Indian companies in the way it sells itself as a compassionate, socially concerned enterprise. "Tata Motors is committed in letter and spirit to Corporate Social Responsibility," the firm's website claims, and is "engaged in community and social initiatives... plays an active role in community development."



This might surprise the farmers of Singur, the richly fertile farmland north-west of Calcutta where the car is being built. The 997-acre site produced three crops a year and provided a decent living to more than 20,000 people. But when Tata picked it for its new plant in 2006 – it is close to a rail junction and a motorway – the communist chief minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, announced that the land was to be forcibly acquired under a Raj-era law.

Many of the farmers and sharecroppers dug in their heels when they realised the non-negotiable compensation would be half the market value. Seven people have died since the resistance began, including a teenage girl called Tapasi Malik who was raped and strangled by goons guarding the land. But Tata has managed to drown out the farmers' cries of anguish with their slick talk of "community development".

Others baffled by Tata's claims to being socially concerned include tribals of Bastar in Chhatisgarh, fighting to prevent their ancestral lands being torn up for a Tata iron ore mine; and relatives of 13 tribal people shot dead by police at Kalinganagar in Orissa in January 2006, a village site earmarked for a Tata steel plant. The atrocity shocked Indian public opinion and protesters blocked a main road through the area for more than a year. But this week Tata Steel announced that construction of the huge plant will start within the next three months.

QINETIQ

Getting the bird

QINETIQ, the privatised former Ministry of Defence research arm, is threatening legal action to force Portsmouth city council to turn a strip of public land which is part of a nature conservation site into a highway so it can make yet more millions for its shareholders (*Eyes passim*).

QinetiQ, which already has a right of way, needs an extra stretch of land for an access road to its planned development of luxury flats and apartments on a disused gunnery range at Eastney beach. Environmentalists are worried about threats to the birds which use the beach and adjoining site of important nature conservation (SNIC) for roosting and feeding. Of particular concern is the protected Dartford Warbler, which is very prone to disturbance and is at risk – not to mention the naturists who are likely to be driven off the secluded beach they have used with the blessing of the MoD and council since the 1940s.

To the anger of local opponents, Portsmouth council has already given outline permission for the controversial development; but it cannot proceed as designed unless the environmentally sensitive access strip is appropriated (for which QinetiQ is offering a miserly £75,000). It has already emerged that QinetiQ's own environmental assessment failed to include a bird survey in breeding season and that more bird studies need to be done.

Campaigners maintain the council will be in breach of environmental law if it considers land appropriation ahead of sound research and surveys on the impact to wildlife. Nevertheless QintetiQ seems bent on pushing ahead. It is already preparing to take the council to court if it doesn't get its way – a costly legal battle the council can ill-afford. Taxpayers – already screwed by the original privatisation of QinetiQ at a knock down price of £42m – look set to be screwed again.

ROAD TOLLS

Travellers clubbed

DRIVERS travelling between England and Wales have already paid for the second Severn crossing twice over, according to figures revealed by Welsh Assembly Lib Dem leader Mike German. And yet tolls are *still* going up.

Tolls from the bridge (which cost £300m to build) have raised £687m so far and will have yielded almost £1bn before the bridge reverts to government ownership.

The Severn Bridges private public partnership deal was one of the first to privatise UK transport infrastructure, handing the first Severn bridge to a consortium led by construction firm John Laing for free in return for the consortium paying for the £300m construction of the second bridge.

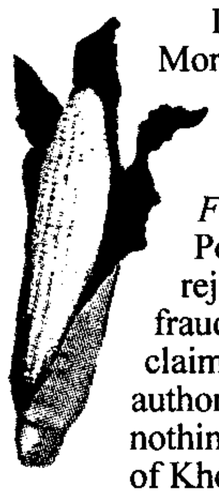
From the start it was clear the deal would mean huge risk-free profits for the consortium at the expense of motorway travellers into Wales: the original legislation, the Severn Bridges Act 1992, guaranteed the consortium's income and profit for more than 20 years.

German has attacked the increase in toll prices on the Severn Bridges for 2008 – now £5.30 for cars and £15.90 for HGVs – and called for tolls to be scrapped altogether once the PPP hands the bridges back to the government. But this will not be by the predicted date of 2014. The European Court of Justice has ruled that motorists should have been charged VAT on the private tolls. Faced with a potentially massive increase in toll prices to make up for the unpaid VAT, a deal was struck with the PPP consortium allowing it instead to extend the period over which it can collect tolls. Thus the Severn Bridges will continue to be nice little earners for Laing and friends until at least 2016.

GM FOOD

Corn on the cobblers

POLITICIANS in Westminster and Dublin have publicly condemned the libel threats used by a former biotech researcher to silence criticism of a dodgy paper on genetically modified crops published in the *British Food Journal*.



Eye readers may remember that when a Canadian research team reported that 50 percent more people preferred GM sweetcorn to the natural variety, they kept quiet about the less-than-subtle notices posted above the two kinds of corn on offer to customers. "Would you eat wormy sweetcorn?" read a sign above the box of natural sweetcorn, while the sign over the GM corn included the words "quality sweetcorn".

A row erupted over the research, which had won the journal's 2004 award for excellence, and in May 2006 the *New Scientist* magazine published calls for the paper to be withdrawn from a researcher into scientific ethics at Cambridge University.

But when the campaign groups GM Watch and GM-Free Ireland published photos of the wormy sweetcorn signs, and joined the "award for fraud" debate, one of the researchers, Shane Morris, now a Canadian government analyst, managed to get the plug pulled on GM Watch for a week after he made defamation claims to the pressure group's internet service provider.

After the *Eye* reported Morris's threats in issue 1194, he wrote to demand a right to reply and made the extraordinary claim that Michael Khoo, then a Greenpeace campaigner, had tampered with the signs to sabotage the research. Morris said a photograph taken of Khoo next to the signs at the time of the study proved his allegation.

It proved no such thing. No one, including Morris, had previously argued the photo showed Khoo had tampered with the signs in the seven years since the study began. Nor did a lengthy letter submitted to the *British Food Journal* by Morris's co-author Douglas Powell, of Kansas State University, which rejected allegations of "bias and academic fraud" leveled at the paper. Neither was Morris's claim about the photo supported by another co-author, Katija Blaine, who told the *Eye* she knew nothing of the allegation. Indeed, the photograph of Khoo was initially used by Morris himself on his own website to show the "wormy signs" had been removed – although subsequent analysis of the photo showed they were still on display.

Khoo said: "Shane Morris must be fairly desperate to create such melodramatic lies seven years after the fact. If any of these things had actually happened, wouldn't he have been the first to call the police or tell the press?"

The *Eye* asked Morris to explain the inconsistencies but he declined, repeating the claim that the photograph showed Khoo uncovering words that had been hidden. As to the Early Day Motions signed by cross-party MPs in Westminster, and the criticism from Irish politicians, Morris said that "no website was attempted to be shut down, as any changes made to anti-GM websites were their decision based on complaints regarding specific wording claims that were requested to be changed".

The row looks set to continue.

SATANIC PANIC

The devil's in the detail

IS SATANIC panic making a comeback? Valerie Sinason, a controversial psychotherapist and believer in the existence of Satanic ritual abuse, was recently invited to give a keynote talk on "ritual abuse and Dissociative Identity Disorder" (see *Eye* 1158), formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder, to childcare workers at a conference in London.

Both conditions have been discredited in the US; but Sinason was asked to share her "extensive experience" with an audience of child abuse specialists, from social workers and police officers to paediatricians and child psychologists, by the London Safeguarding Children Board, which covers child protection services across the 32 London boroughs.

Her talk concerned ritual abuse, "including where the consequences of ill treatment can lead to a further condition, dissociative disorder (DID). Treatment can be complicated by the fact that this type of abuse, and DID, is not well understood or believed."

Indeed. The prospect of Sinason converting London's childcare workers to a belief in the existence of ritual abuse and a dubious mental disorder is alarming – especially as the initial Satanic panic in the early 1990s was spread largely through conferences for childcare workers.

DID has been exposed in the US as junk science, while ritual abuse has long been debunked as a myth.

Professor Jean La Fontaine, whose government-funded inquiry into 84 alleged cases of ritual abuse concluded in 1994 that there was no evidence that Satanic ritual abuse actually existed, is appalled that Sinason was invited to address such a high profile conference.

La Fontaine told the *Eye*: "The ritual abuse scare was over 10 years ago and it seems that already the guardians of children's welfare have forgotten how much the myth cost in children's misery, public alarm and legal inquiries without there being a shred of truth in the allegations."

TAX DODGING

Softly, softly

TAXPAYERS agonising over their returns fearing hefty penalties if they get anything wrong, will be shocked to learn that the UK's biggest tax avoider can file dodgy figures with impunity – all thanks to HMRC's business-friendly acting chairman, Dave Hartnett.

When Barclays bank was hit with a record £300m tax bill last year following an HMRC investigation into a scheme to unlawfully siphon profits offshore, it escaped any penalty. By running its payment protection insurance business (itself exposed as a rip-off) through companies taxed at only 10 percent in Dublin, Barclays hoped to channel billions of profits into the tax haven. Tax law, however, required that it paid a commercial commission to its British operations. But the amounts Barclays did pay were only about half what was required – around £1bn short over eight years.

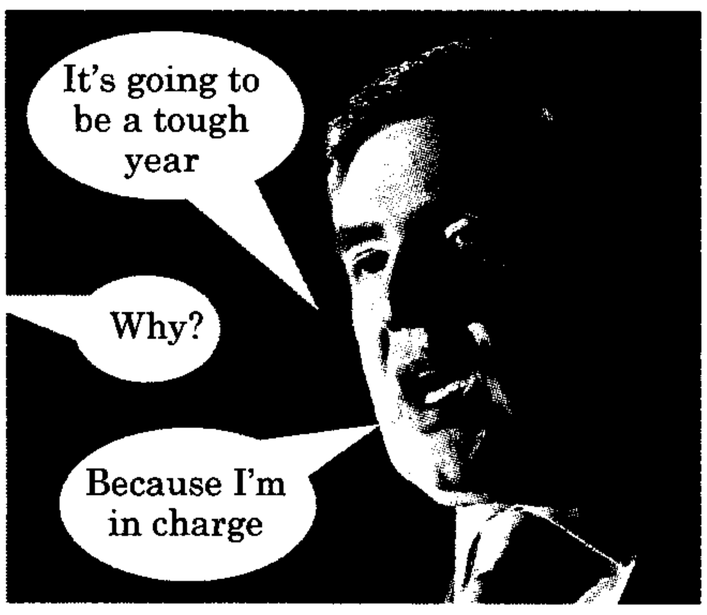
Under HMRC rules, penalties – usually around 10-20 percent of the additional tax bill (which was about £300m in this case) – would normally be charged on such gross omissions from tax returns. But figures published recently in a National Audit Office report on large company taxation show that in 2005/06 and 2006/07 the taxman collected just £20m in penalties from 33 investigations into large companies. None could have come from the Barclays investigation.

The *Eye* understands the let-off – proof of the Revenue's softly, softly approach to big companies – followed meetings and calls between Hartnett and senior Barclays figures over a number of months. HMRC refused to comment.

In the City

THE Northern Wreck clock is ticking very loudly as Gordon Brown and his straw man Chancellor Alistair Darling try to avoid the potential £50bn-plus hole dug by their panicked decision to present the failing would-be bank with a blank cheque from the taxpayer.

Next week sees the shareholders' meeting which neither directors nor politicians want, at which the hedge funds will try to use the blackmail threat of legal action to force a bailout. Next month the European Commission will want to see that Northern Wreck is not being kept in business with state aid – the stark fact which shareholders chose to ignore. Meanwhile the only declared bidders – the Virgin and Olivant consortia – struggle to raise the entry fee, a £10-£15bn immediate repayment to the Bank of England.



Virgin is still perceived as the front-runner even though it is offering less back immediately. But a study of the Branson banking experience gives little comfort to those more concerned about the taxpayer than Northern Wreck shareholders (who have had a good run since demutualisation) or hedge funds that bought in since it became clear the company was going down.

Take the valuation placed on the Virgin Money business, which is to be injected into Northern Wreck as part of the bearded wonder's contribution to a rescue. This is put at £250m with another £650m in cash coming from Branson's four partners; all will then subscribe for new Northern Wreck shares in a rights issue designed to bring the total cash/assets injection to £1.55bn. As usual, Branson intends to put in more "assets" than cash while looking to take out only cash.

But that £250m price tag looks remarkably high when it is considered that a year ago Virgin Money was valued at only £199m, when it was sold/transferred from the UK-registered Virgin Money Investment Group to the British Virgin Islands tax haven-based Virgin Group Investments. This transaction was revealed in VMIG company documents filed just before Christmas. No cash changed hands. As so often with Virgin deals, the payment became an inter-group debt which has since been assigned by VMIG to yet another Virgin company, Virgin Wings (which owns the airline and railway interests), carrying an interest rate likely to be above what Branson wants to pay the Bank of England on the outstanding £15bn-plus.

But more remarkably, VMIG paid just £2 to "buy" the Virgin Money Group (now called Virgin Money Holdings UK) in May 2005. The low price was based on the fact that the group had substantial net liabilities, due to the more than £60m owed to other Virgin group companies. This arose after Branson had bought out the 50 percent held by City investors Henderson Holdings in 2004 for £50m – valuing the business at £100m.

So if Virgin Money was worth only £2 in 2005, how did it become worth £199m in January 2007 and £250m now? Especially as it still had net liabilities of £29m in December 2006. And the £250m suggests a multiple of 20 times earnings: most banks are rated on less than a half that multiple.

The valuation question is particularly pertinent when the Virgin Money track record is considered. First to be said is that Virgin is not a bank and neither Branson nor Virgin has any serious banking experience – odd, it might be thought, for the rescuer of a bank with a £100bn-plus mortgage book and debts to match heading into a potential perfect economic storm.

Branson has always done his banking business in partnership with real bankers, initially Royal Bank of Scotland and now MBNA, which provide the expertise for the credit cards and loans Virgin sells. The rest of the Virgin Money business is ISAs, PEPs, unit trusts, insurance and some deposit business, all in partnership deals with other financial institutions.

Virgin Money's turnover in 2006 was only £75m, and profits £10m. But the group still had accumulated losses of £52m since 1995. The turnover figures used to be much more impressive – over £500m in 1999 and £248m in 2005. But that was because Virgin was including the gross value of the unit trusts it sold! These figures slumped when the stock market tanked between 2000 and 2003.

Auditors KPMG suddenly decided last year – they had agreed the previous inherited position since 2004 – that this was not a correct interpretation of accounting rules. So now the figure only includes management fees net of rebates. And most of even that £75m in 2006 came from discontinued credit operations.

What is now Virgin Money Holdings UK began life as Virgin Direct. It was not until 2000 that the company made an operating profit – £151,000. The company was almost entirely supported by loans from insurers AMP, later acquired by Henderson, which ultimately pumped in almost £100m, compared with £6m from Branson family trusts. The directors, who then included Jayne-Anne Gadhia, who returned as chief executive last March, expected to break even in the medium term. The company continued to lose money until 2003, by which time total losses had exceeded £100m. These historic losses, still worth £24m at the end of 2006, are now available to offset tax on future profits made by Northern Wreck.

Branson talks a lot about the value of the Virgin brand. However, the Virgin trademarks are valued at just £4.6m in the Virgin Money books!

After the sale by Henderson, Virgin became the sole supporter of Virgin Money. By 2005 Virgin Management and certain Virgin, ie Branson family, trusts had loaned the group £62m at up to 2 percent over the LIBOR interest marker. But in 2006 Branson cut a deal with Lloyds TSB, ironically the rejected suitor for Northern Wreck, which has loaned the group up to £70m on much better terms. This enabled the Virgin company and trusts to be repaid all their money. This £70m loan and facility is secured on the Virgin Money assets which are to be injected into Northern Wreck, so presumably Lloyds will still have first claim, not the taxpayer.

The Virgin Money Holdings accounts also show how Branson continues to take money out of the business in other ways – arrangements that presumably would continue if the business were injected into Northern Wreck. The group paid licence fees of £353,000 to Virgin Enterprises in 2006 and incurred credit card commissions and air miles charges to Virgin Atlantic Airways of £4.2m.

VMIG is in turn owned by Virgin Money Investment Holdings, which was once called VDL Holdings when it owned 50 percent of the old Virgin Direct. It sold that 50 percent for £1 to VMIG in March 2005. It had paid £22,000 for those shares. VMIG acquired the remainder of Virgin Money two months later for another £1 from the same BVI-based Virgin Group Investments that has now bought the business again.

The VMIH accounts to March 2006 were only filed on Christmas Eve 2007 – almost a year late and in flagrant breach of company law. A good example from Labour's preferred partner. But then punctuality is not a Branson forte when it comes to corporate disclosure. The Virgin Wings accounts to March 2006 were also only filed two weeks ago. Also the financial year-end of VMIH – 31 March – is different from that of its subsidiary Virgin Money Holdings – 31 December. Another regular Branson wrinkle that makes evaluation difficult.

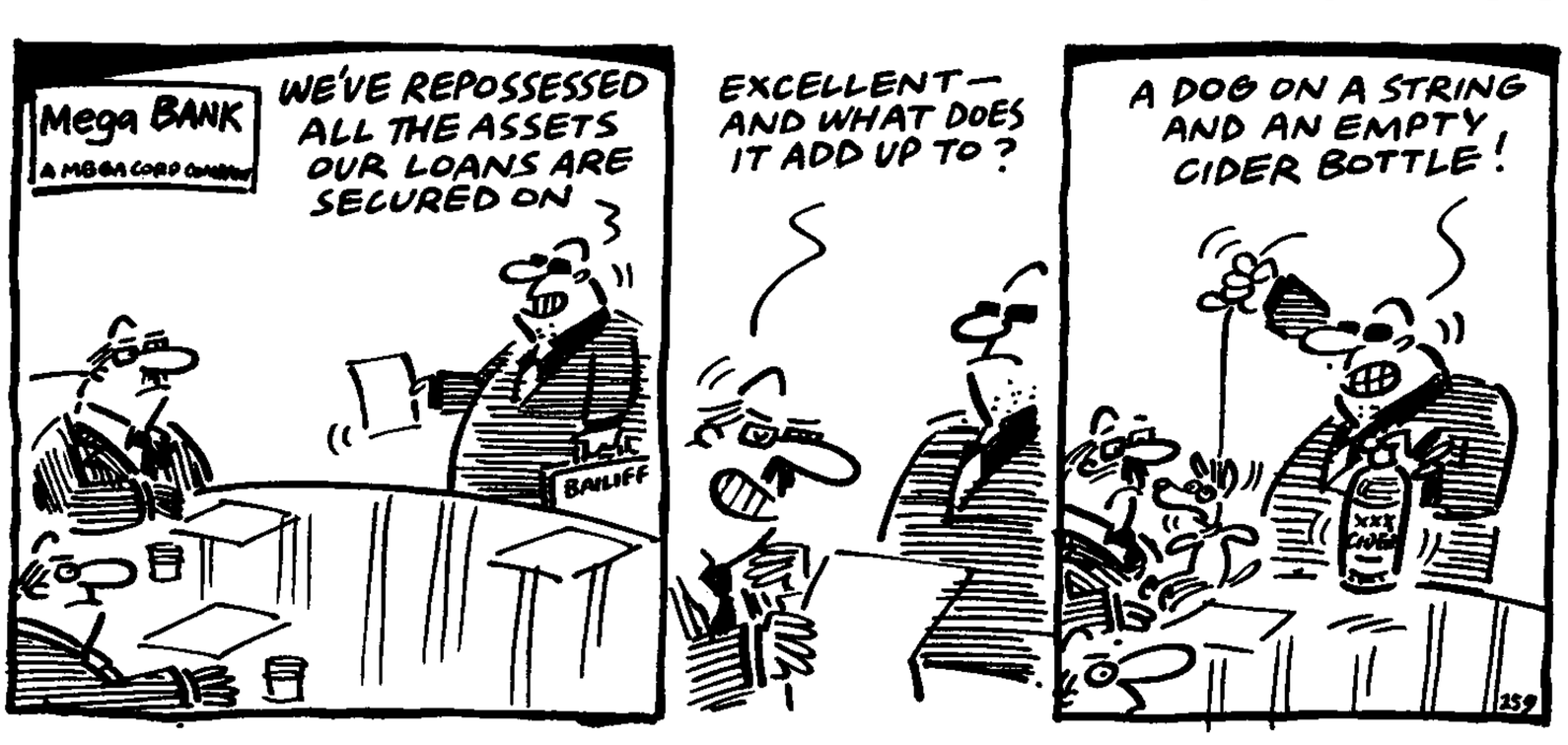
The VMIH accounts have only been prepared on a "going concern" basis because the Branson trusts have agreed to provide backing "for at least the next 12 months". Such support was largely necessary because Virgin Money had net liabilities of £49m when acquired in 2005 – all attributed to "goodwill". VMIH last year also spent $49m to acquire CircleLending, which is the basis for its Virgin Money USA operation.

Given Branson's history in the world of finance – he has not even been a director of Virgin Money since 2004 - the question has to be that whatever his undoubted marketing skills, is he the man to be involved in running a major failed bank at a time when house prices are falling, bad debts are rising and money is tight and expensive?

LATER this month MPs on the Commons Treasury select committee will have an opportunity to question Straw Man about his new plan to make the Fundamentally Supine Authority the all-powerful banking regulator that will prevent any more Northern Wrecks, despite failing miserably to spot or stop Northern Wreck itself.

Why anyone should have faith in the FSA is hard to imagine. Certainly many of its own staff do not. A recent survey is said to have found that almost half were planning to leave. That is in keeping with data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, which showed that since 2005 almost twice as many permanent staff from the FSA's four main regulatory divisions have left as have been recruited – 154 in, 262 out. That loss has been particularly heavy in the key wholesale firms division (31 in, 96 out) which deals with big City banks, but also in the major retail groups, which covered Northern Wreck, (33 in, 51 out) and retail firms (54 in, 80 out) divisions.

And the regulatory drain appears to be accelerating, fuelled by the higher pay and pensions available in the private sector to those


THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
Mega BANK
A MEGA CORP COMPANY
WE'VE REPOSSESSED ALL THE ASSETS OUR LOANS ARE SECURED ON
BAILIFF
EXCELLENT— AND WHAT DOES IT ADD UP TO ?
A DOG ON A STRING AND AN EMPTY CIDER BOTTLE !
XXX CIDER
259

"You'll never believe what my house isn't worth"

with FSA insider knowledge. The total losses across the four divisions rose from 68 in 2005 to 100 in 2006, and was 94 by last November. And this is the same FSA that the chancellor assures us will keep our banks safe?

MPs should ask Darling how many FSA officials involved in regulating Northern Wreck have left in the past two years, and how many are now on permanent sick leave.

OLYMPIC boss Sebastian Coe's problems at Complete Leisure Group continue. Director Sir Robert Miller resigned last month. He had been complaining about unpaid fees. The much delayed CLG accounts for 2006 – it owns the right to the Coe brand which earned £700,000 (nothing to do with London 2012) – were only signed by auditors Adler Shine in November, after new chairman Harold Tillman provided a personal guarantee to HSBC in return for a £150,000 overdraft facility.

Meanwhile CLG has written off £75,000 of a £225,000 debt owed by a subsidiary of the Frankfurt-listed but London-based MCC Global, which was an early investor. This money was due in December 2006 extended to March 2008. MCC has promised to repay £150,000 by 31 March. However, the rest has been written off "due to uncertainty over the recoverability". Two directors of MCC subsidiary Moore Clayton UK have resigned since August.

ONCE again it is time for the Gnome Institute for Greed Management to recognise the great achievers of 2007.

Crook of the Year: to **Conrad Black**, not for being finally convicted but for his resolute Flat Earth Society denial of any fault any time, anywhere.

Suit of the Year: to **Adam Applegarth** of Northern Wreck for proving you can fool all of the regulatory people all of the time, cash in on the way up and get the taxpayer to pick up the bill on the way down.

Asset Strip of the Year: a special one-off award goes to **Donal Kinsella**, sacked as deputy chairman of Irish mining company Kenmare Resources for appearing naked three times in one night at the Mozambique hotel bedroom door of company secretary Deidre Corcoran.

Newcomer of the Year: to Planet Football's top scorer **Mike Ashley** of Newcastle United and Sports Direct, who, helped by bankers Merrill Lynch, found the mugs to pay him £929m for shares now worth a third of that.

Comeback of the Year: to fugitive Californian conman **Norman Hsu**, who resurfaced as a major fundraiser for Hillary Clinton, making donations but also using front donors (shades of David Abrahams) helped by another even bigger Ponzi scheme.

The Golden Trough: a new award shared by **Bob Nardelli**, sacked as DIY retailer Home Depot chief executive with a $210m pay-off (he is now running Chrysler), and **Angelo Mozilo**, still chairman and chief executive of Countrywide Financial – one of the biggest builders of the US sub-prime bubble – despite selling shares worth $138m in the months before the crisis hit as well as paying himself a mere $142m for 2006.

And 2008 looks set to be an even better year as those sub-prime bills come rolling in.

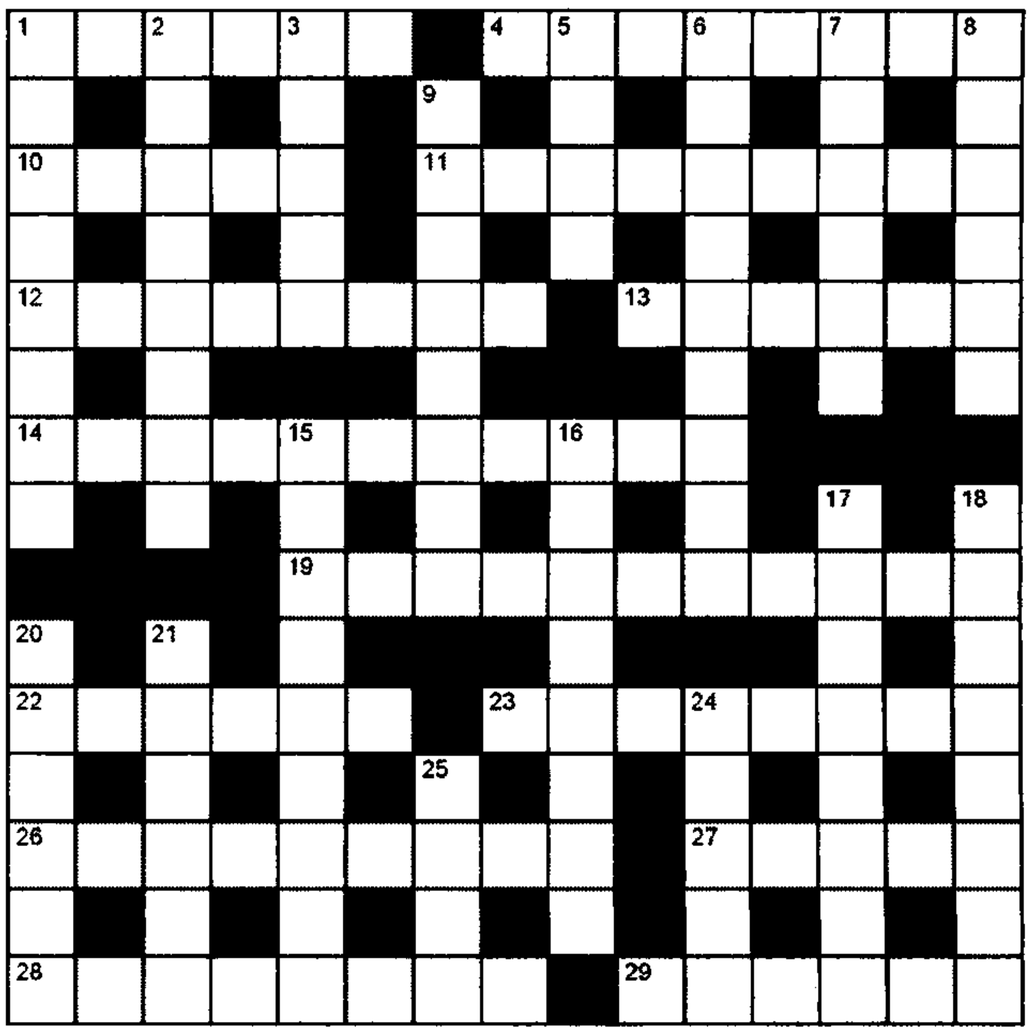
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 356

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 18 January 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Pissed, so I'm with Camden's top Conservative clowns (6)
4 No couch potato wants copper to have a tantrum (8)
10 Blair has time for right slinky dish (5)
11 Burmese start to name politician with gnashers round middle of penis – one of many (9)
12 In a position to think of England? Cool! (4,4)
13 One who'll wind up getting arse molested after the entertainment starts (6)
14 Brenda's OK description of Prince Edward? "Not much entertainment" (5,6)
19/7 Politician's demand to continue avoiding the question of panellist fee he's negotiated with MI (6,3,2,6)
22 Wilson, Heath quite randy between them (2,4)
23 "Continental" involves one bloke straddling another (8)
26 The gutter's the place for female harassers who do (9)
27 Stage girl with nothing on gets runs (5)
28 It irritates press member (8)
29 Scuttle McCartney's sound? (6)

DOWN

1 Balls shown by men at last (8)
2 Masculine, false guilt of Cyclops having an erection as means to get 4? (8)
3 Cameron's opening branch – go up the wall? (5)
5 Some British PM! Unqualified backing! Er, I rather doubt that (4)
6 Nuts after Lee's arrangement of Earth Wind and Fire? (9)
7 See 19 Across
8 Tabloid's leader – crap about "Resistance leads to the top" (1-5)
9 Openly gay actor's group at climax of *Cymbeline* "untouchable"? (8)
15 Brandishing candle, rap performer covering genital area (9)
16 Semen spilled by heartless Bill on hem of aide's costume (8)
17 Caner first needs to get this project (5,3)
18 It's not her issue who takes advantage of her tits (3,5)
20 Boner gets Dick out of bed (4-2)
21 Ex-PM wedded to the Prince of Darkness! (6)
24 Being found everywhere embracing Left will get you sack (5)
25 Not the full frontal chick that helps you dry off (4)

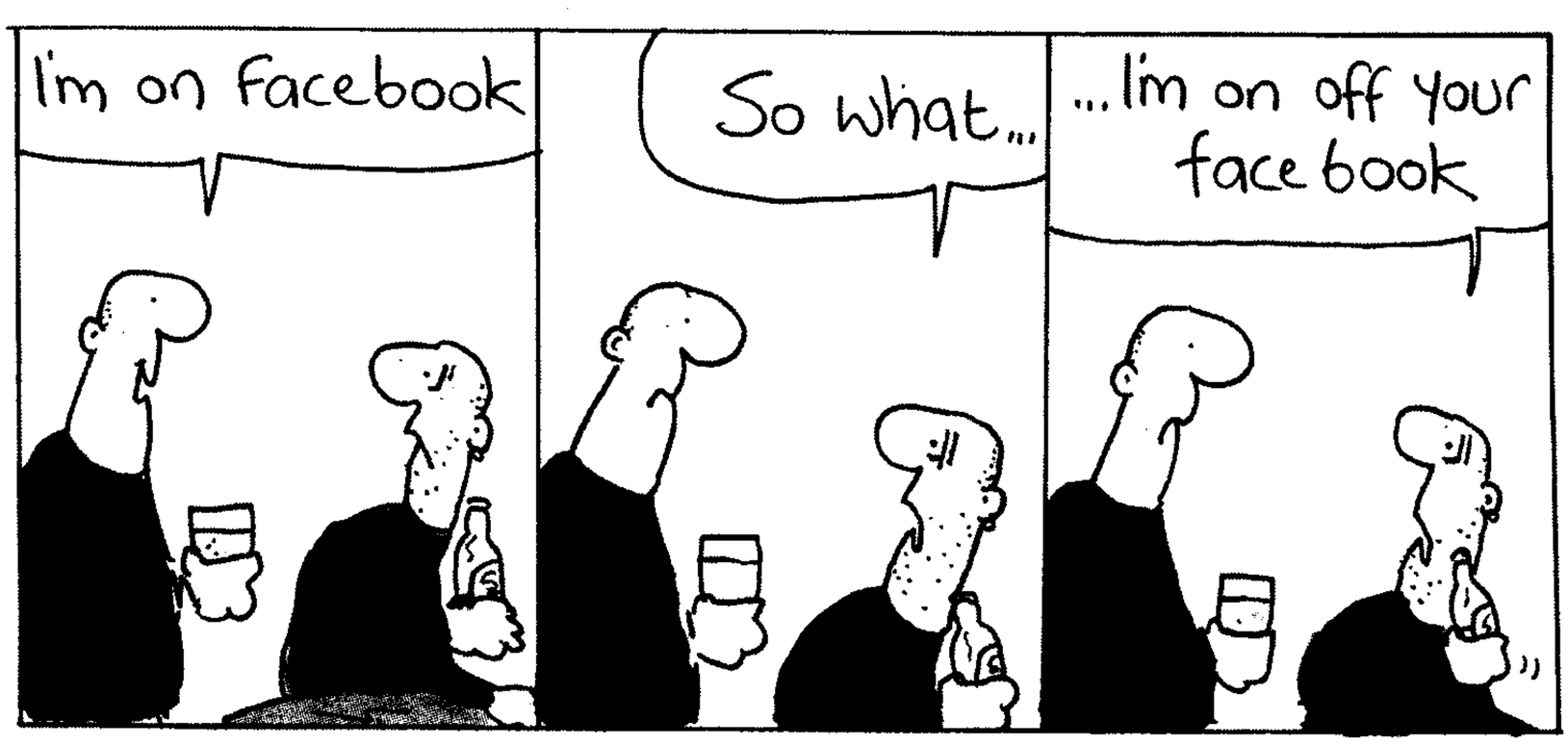
Crossword 355 winner: NICK WARREN

ACROSS: 13 Oil-tanker 14 Well-rounded 15 Caper 16 Look on the bright side 17 Swelled 18 Yank 19 Headphones 20 Archipelago 23 Kestrel 24 Manager 26 Cole tit 29 Ember 31 Decrease 32 * Roger Scruton 35 Teddy bears 36 Grim Reaper 37 Corfu 39 Anvil 40 Body armour 41 Bolshevist 44 Self-flattery 46 Kashmiri 47 Throb 49 Hogarth 51 Schlepp 52 Grouper 56 Dumbing down 57 Eucalyptol 59 Polo 61 Tramway 63 Strictly for the birds 65 Untie 66 Materialise 67 Transvaal.

DOWN: 1 Nul Points 2 Weapon 3 Take the pledge 4 Airheads 5 Lower Chamber 6 Halogen 7 Curate's egg 8 Aguti 9 Audience 10 Tides 11 Rockefeller 12 Expellant 20 Aureoled 21 Incisor 22 Ark Royal 25 Nostromo 27 Accredits 28 Net profit 30 Bedevil 33 Terrier 34 Amputate 37 Creation 38 Garrison 40 Bear hug 42 Swing both ways 43 Chapel of rest 45 Ferris wheel 48 Wheel-chair 50 Gymnastic 53 Procreate 54 Rossetti 55 Operetta 58 Collide 60 Abuser 62 Yemen 64 Rural.

PERIMETER QUOTATION: "... WINE WITH ALL THE CHARACTER REQUIRED TO STAND UP TO BARTOK'S BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE, BRILLIANTLY CONDUCTED THIS PAST WEEK BY [Marin] ALSOP ..." by * Roger Scruton (quoted in *Eye* 1188, p.28)

HUSBAND



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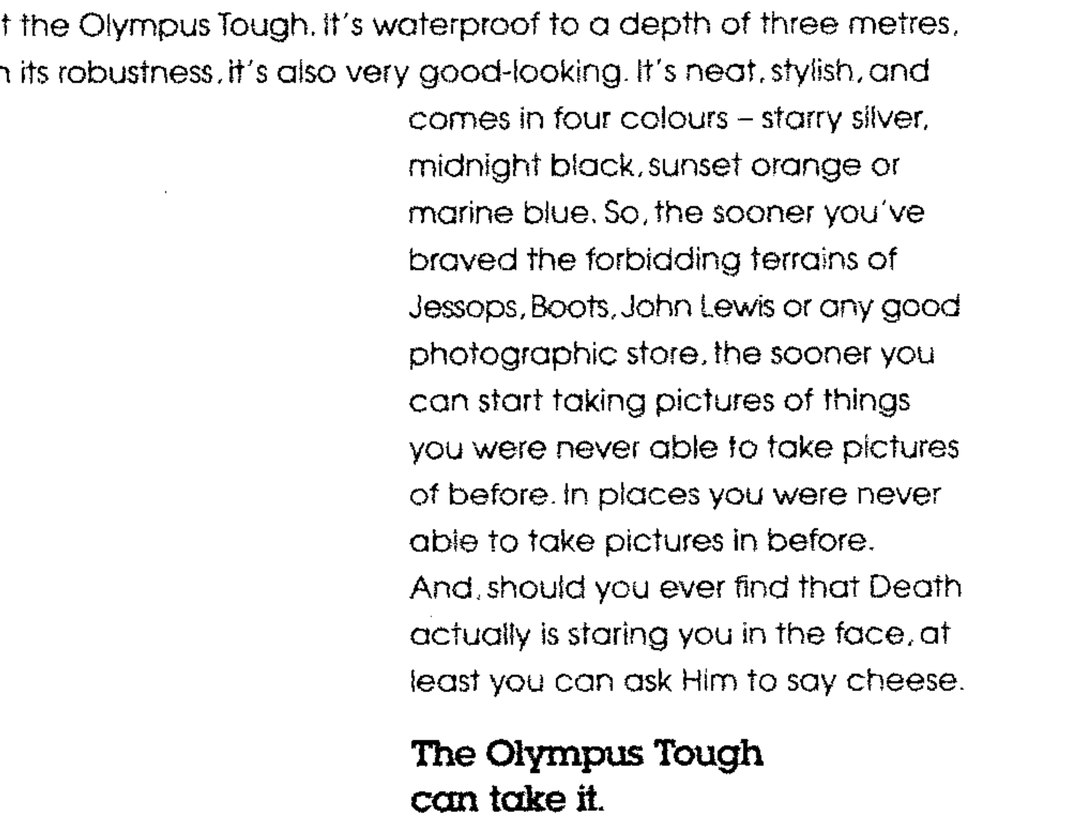

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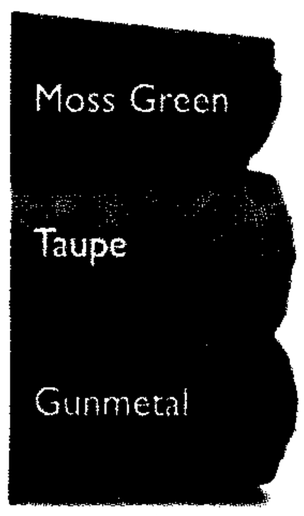

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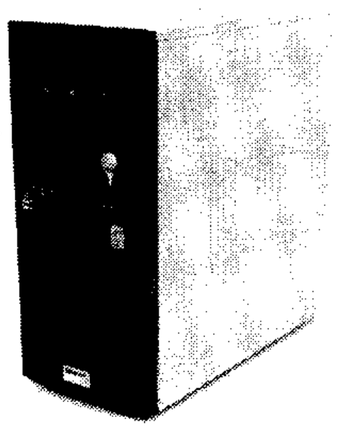

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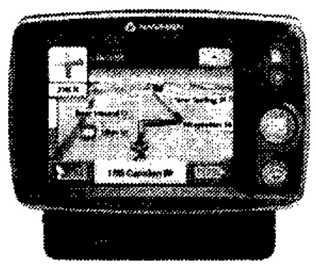

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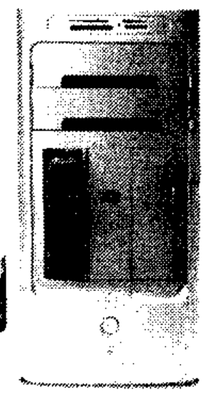

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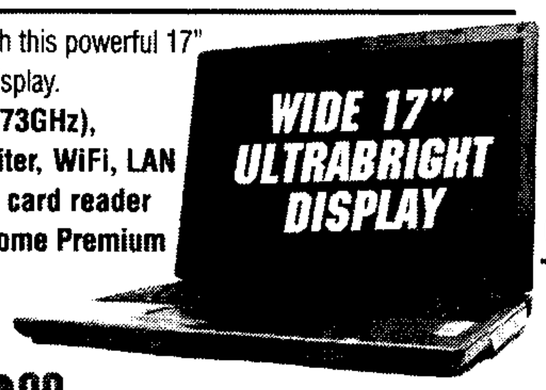

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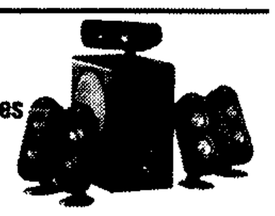

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ONETEL CORDLESS DECT & ANSWERPHONE

- **Single cordless DECT handset, blue backlit display**
- **100 name/number phonebook, handsfree calling**
- **80 minute digital answer machine, 9 ringtones**

Brand new stock, 1 year warranty

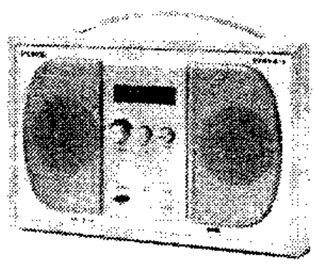
£12.99 ex VAT **£15.26** inc VAT

PURE EVOKE 2 DAB RADIO

Portable DAB radio with FM mode and mains or battery power options.

- **High quality 3" stereo speakers**
- **Select stations by name**
- **Scrolling text shows station contents**
- **Optical, stereo & headphone outputs**

Stock status: Factory rework stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty



PURE DIGITAL

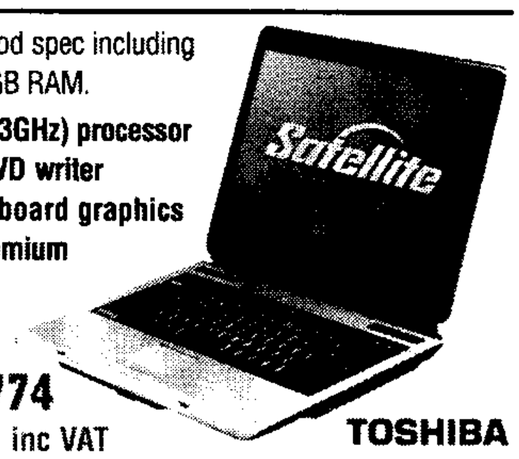
£39.99 ex VAT **£46.99** inc VAT

TOSHIBA A100-02L CORE 2 DUO

Excellent value notebook with a good spec including a massive 120GB hard disk and 1GB RAM.

- **Intel Core 2 Duo T5300 (2 x 1.73GHz) processor**
- **1GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, DVD writer**
- **15.4" widescreen display, onboard graphics**
- **WiFi, Windows Vista Home Premium**

Stock status: Factory rework stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty



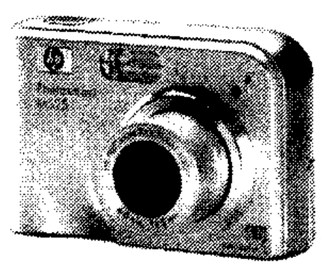
£329.99 ex VAT **£387.74** inc VAT TOSHIBA

HP PHOTOSMART M525

Brand new compact and stylish high resolution 6.0 megapixel digital camera.

- **3x optical zoom, 7x digital zoom**
- **1.7" display, easy to use menu**
- **7 shooting modes, auto flash**
- **Movie mode with sound, SD slot**

Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty

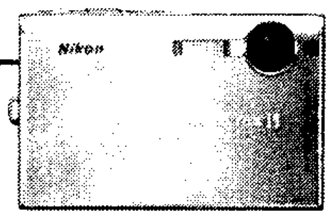


£42.54 ex VAT **£49.98** inc VAT hp invent

NIKON COOLPIX S9

- **6.1 megapixel slimline digital camera**
- **3x optical zoom, 2.0" LCD display**
- **Movie mode with sound, auto flash**

Grade A stock, 6 month warranty

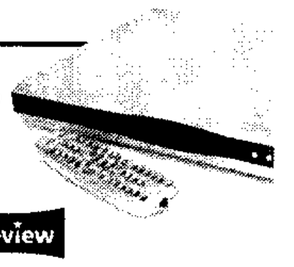


£69.99 ex VAT **£82.24** inc VAT Nikon

DIGITAL FUSION 80GB PVR

- **Twin tuner 80GB Freeview recorder**
- **Record up to 40 hours, pause & rewind TV**
- **7 day epg, twin SCART, remote control**

Factory rework stock, 6 month warranty



£42.54 ex VAT **£49.98** inc VAT Freeview

GATEWAY ULTRABRIGHT NOTEBOOK

Intel Celeron M (1.6GHz) processor with 15.4" UltraBright widescreen TFT display.

- **1GB DDR2 RAM, 80GB SATA hard drive**
- **224MB shared graphics, card reader, WiFi**
- **Dual layer multi format DVD writer**
- **Microsoft Vista Home Premium**

Stock status: Factory rework stock
Warranty: 6 month warranty

£212.76 ex VAT **£249.99** inc VAT Gateway

WENGER HUDSON BACKPACK

- **Fits up to and including 15.4" notebooks**
- **Massive storage, loads of compartments**
- **Shock absorbing shoulder straps**

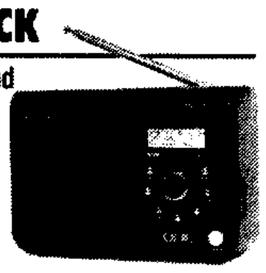
Brand new stock, lifetime warranty

£16.99 ex VAT **£19.96** inc VAT

PURE ONE DAB RADIO - BLACK

- **DAB radio with FM mode for hiss free sound**
- **Scrolling backlit info display, 20 presets**
- **Clock with kitchen and sleep timers**

Grade A stock, 1 year warranty



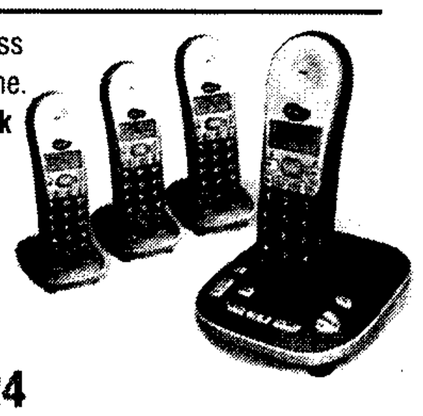
£24.99 **£29.36**

ONETEL DECT QUAD PACK

Four stylish DECT digital cordless handsets and answering machine.

- **100 name/number phone book**
- **Handsfree calling mode**
- **80 minute answerphone**
- **3 additional charger bases**

Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 1 year warranty



£29.99 ex VAT **£35.24** inc VAT

MSI PR210 YA EDITION

Don't be spoilt for colour with this high performance range of blue, pink and green notebooks from MSI.

- **AMD Dual Core TK-55 (2 x 1.8GHz), 2GB RAM**
- **120GB hd, DVD writer, 12.1" widescreen TFT**
- **WiFi, Bluetooth, HDMI out, Card reader**
- **Weighs just 1.8kg, Vista Home Premium**

Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 2 year warranty

£510.63 ex VAT **£599.99** inc VAT MSI

VO200 BLUETOOTH INTERNET PHONE

- **Stores & charges when docked in PC Card slot**
- **Handsfree and handset modes**
- **Works with all Internet phone services**

Brand new stock, 2 year warranty

£19.99 ex VAT **£23.49** inc VAT Kensington

WHARFEDALE 80GB DVDR FREEVIEW REC

- **Freeview digital recorder, pause & rewind TV**
- **DVD recorder & player, no subscriptions**
- **Twin SCART, remote control included**

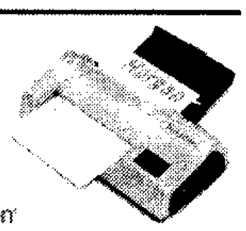
Factory rework stock, 6 month warranty

£79.99 ex VAT **£93.99** inc VAT

KENSINGTON BUSINESS CARD SCANNER

- **Smallest compact design, USB powered**
- **Auto field identifier, scans both sides**
- **Scans straight into your email client**

Brand new stock, 2 year warranty



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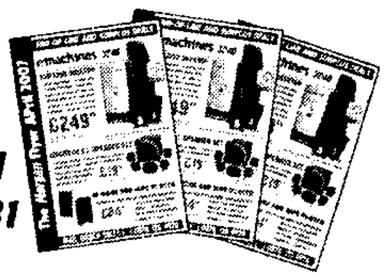

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